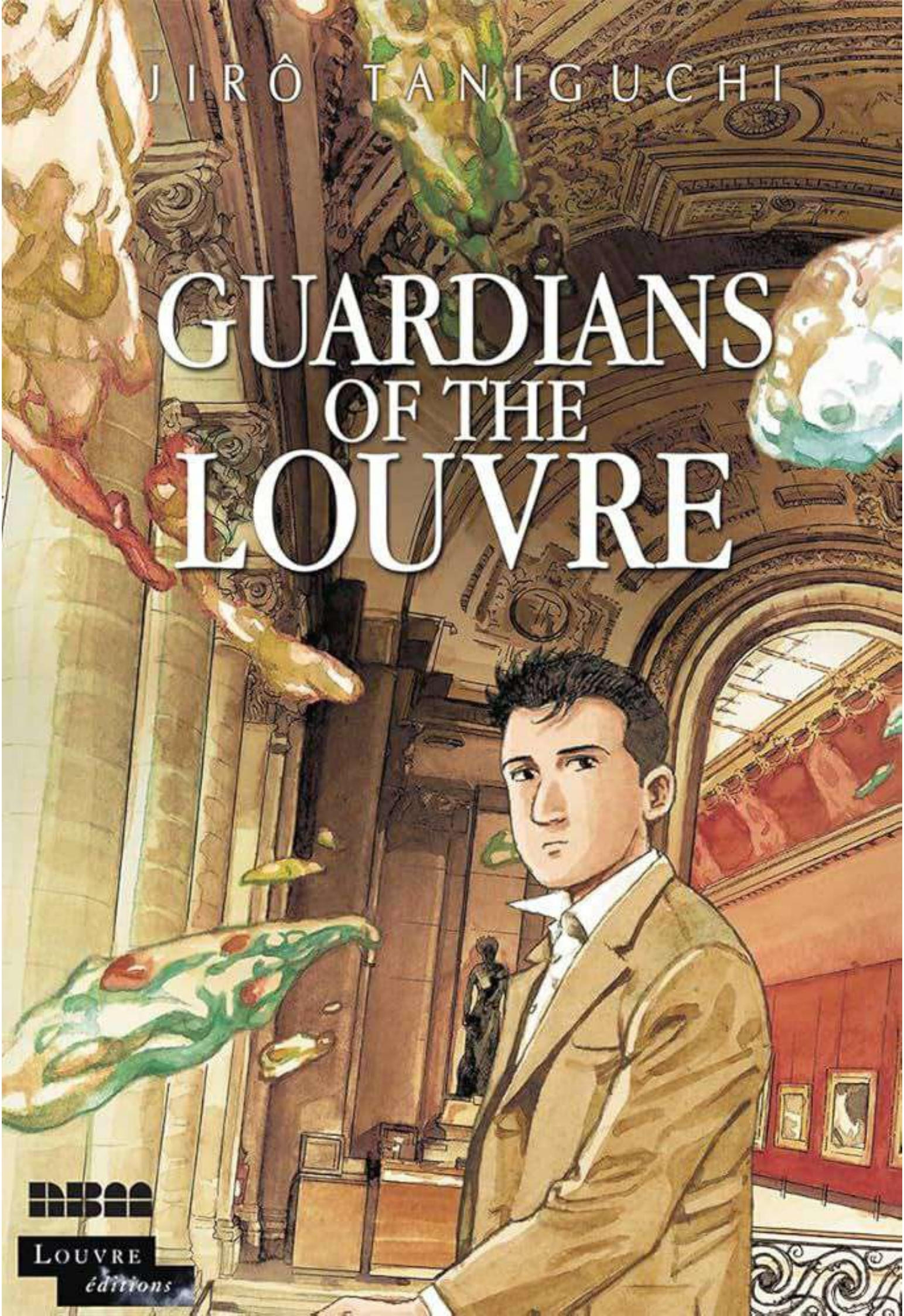
JIRÔ TANIGUCHI
GUARDIANS OF THE LOUVRE
LOUVRE éditions

GUARDIANS OF THE LOUVRE

TRANSLATED FROM THE JAPANESE BY KUMAR SIVASUBRAMANIAN

JIRO TANIGUCHI

nbm GRAPHIC NOVELS
Nantier • Beall • Minoustchine
NEW YORK

LOUVRE éditions

ISBN 978-1-68112-034-8
Junior Library Guild Edn.: ISBN 978-1-68112-064-5
Library of Congress Control Number: 2016931404
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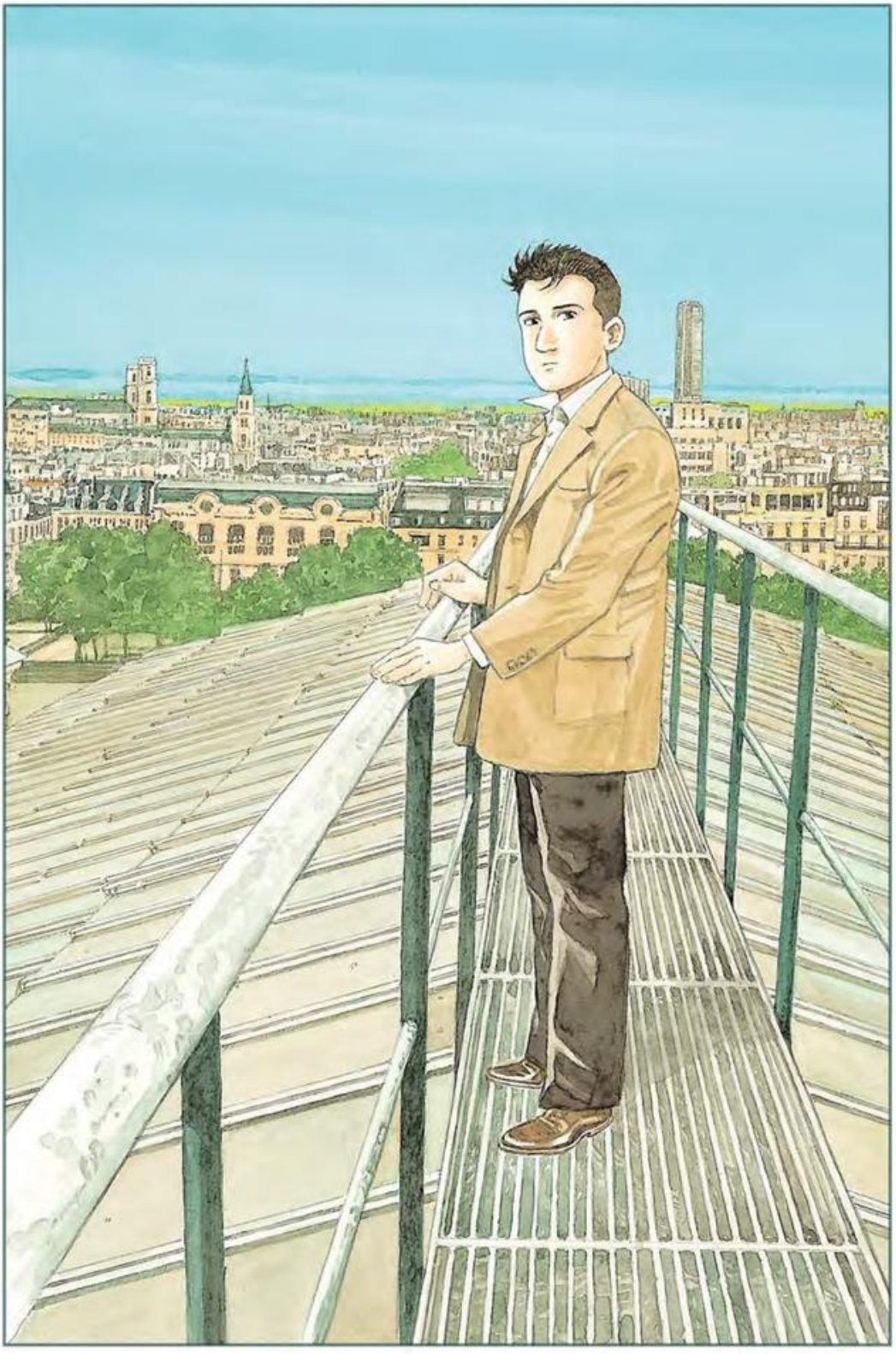
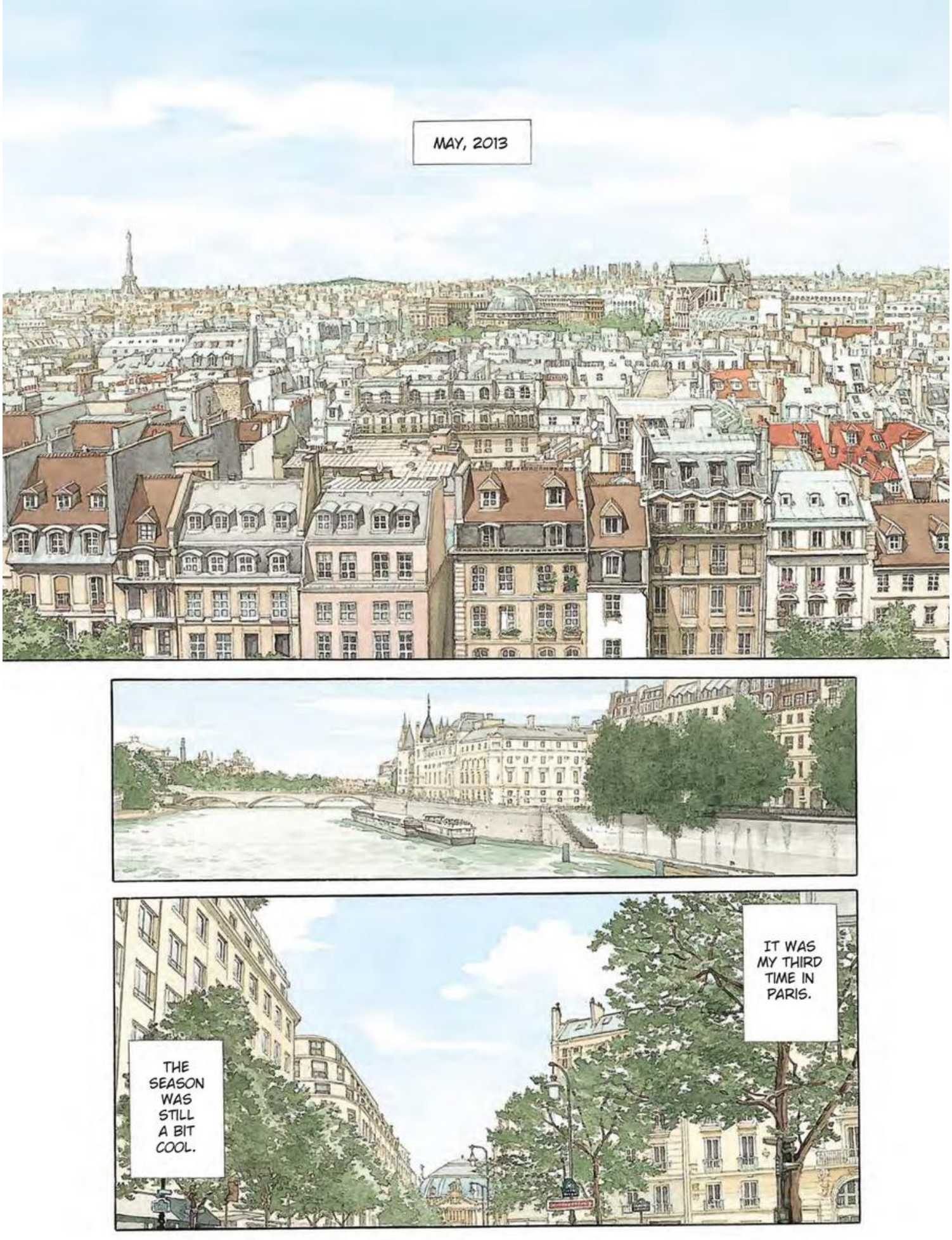
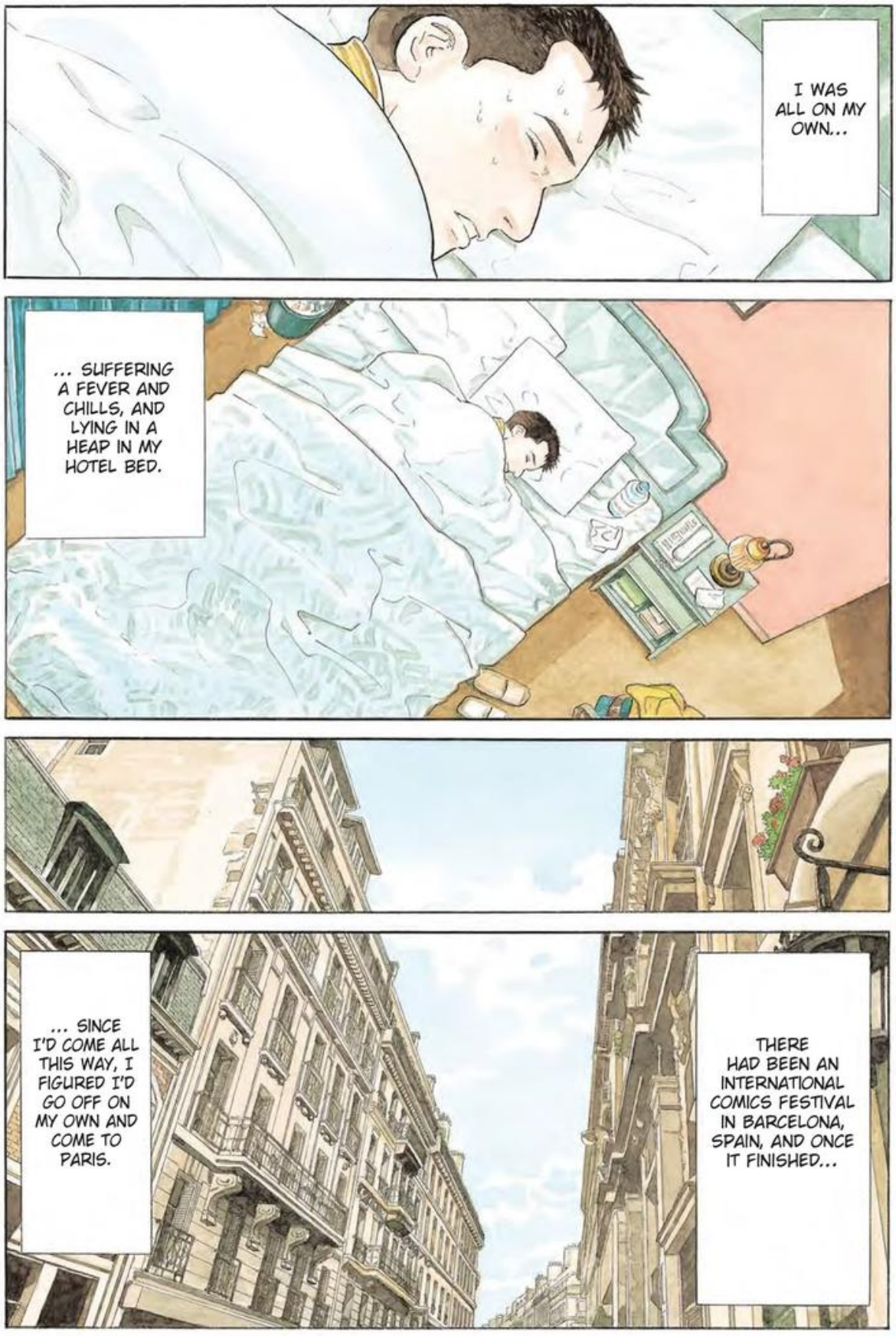
© Fanfare / Ponent Mon, 2016 for English edition
Translated from the Japanese by Kumar Sivasubramanian
Edited by Fanfare and NBM
Lettering by Ill Wind Tidings
1st printing May 2016 in China



CHAPTER 1

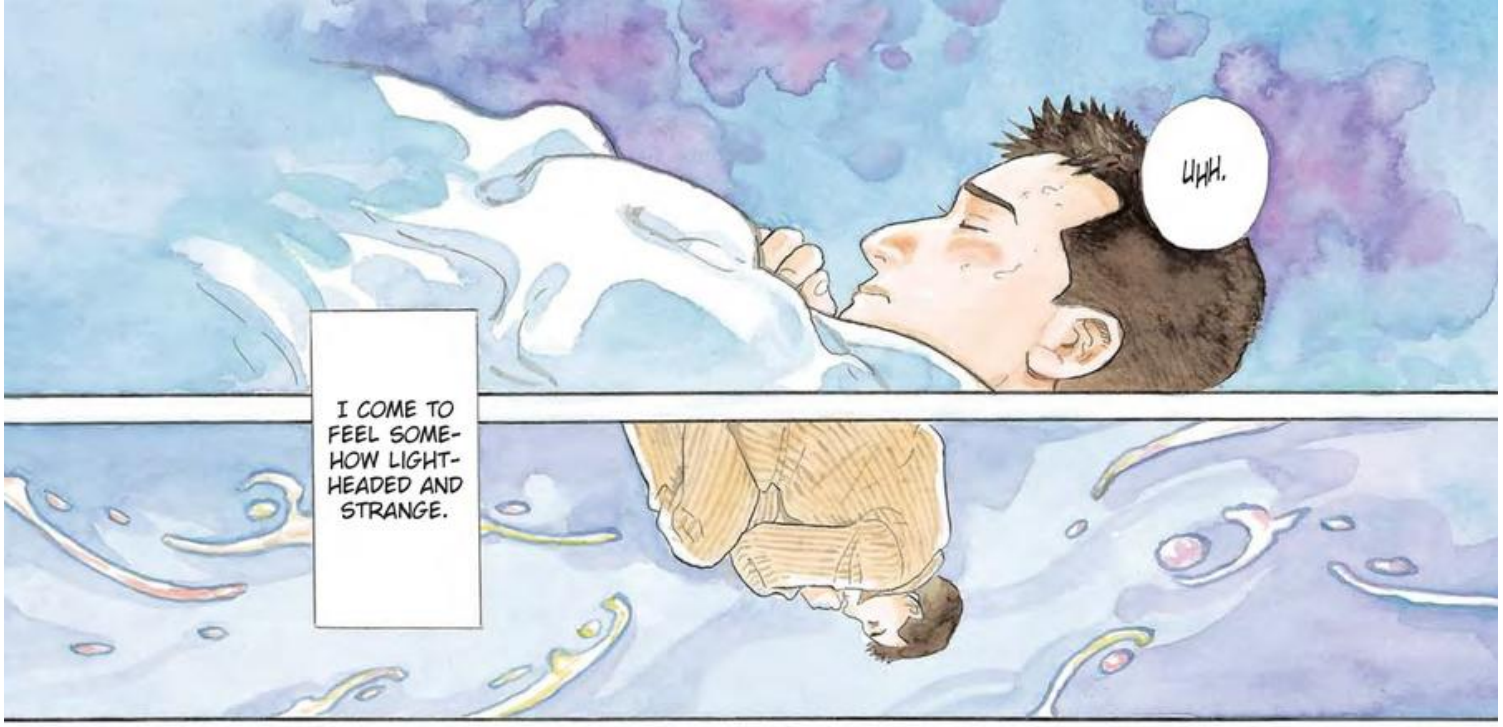
GUARDIANS OF THE LOUVRE


MAY, 2013
IT WAS MY THIRD TIME IN PARIS.
THE SEASON WAS STILL A BIT COOL.


I WAS ALL ON MY OWN...
... SUFFERING A FEVER AND CHILLS, AND LYING IN A HEAP IN MY HOTEL BED.
... SINCE I'D COME ALL THIS WAY, I FIGURED I'D GO OFF ON MY OWN AND COME TO PARIS.
THERE HAD BEEN AN INTERNATIONAL COMICS FESTIVAL IN BARCELONA, SPAIN, AND ONCE IT FINISHED...

WAS IT A BUILD-UP OF WORK FATIGUE FROM BACK IN JAPAN?
URR ...
MY PLAN HAD BEEN TO STAY ABOUT FIVE DAYS AND THEN RETURN TO TOKYO, BUT...
I STARTED GETTING A COLD.
ATCHOO!
BEING UNABLE TO ACCLIMATIZE TO THE JETLAG AND MY TENSION OVER THE FESTIVAL HAD EXHAUSTED ME.
HRR ...
MUCOUS MEMBRANE WAS INFLAMED AND WOULDN'T STOP BLEEDING.
BNFF!
BNFF!

ALONE IN A HOTEL ROOM IN A FOREIGN COUNTRY, UNABLE TO COMMUNICATE.
BRR ...
...SO COLD...!
I TOOK SOME COMMON COLD MEDICATION I BROUGHT FROM JAPAN.
SO ANXIOUS AND LONE-SOME.
HRNN ...
FEVER-STRICKEN, I DREAM.
THINGS I CAN'T MAKE SENSE OF DRIFT BEFORE MY EYES.


UHH.
I COME TO FEEL SOMEHOW LIGHTHEADED AND STRANGE.

SUDDENLY...

... ALARMING THOUGHTS GO THROUGH MY HEAD, LIKE MAYBE I'LL JUST DIE HERE LIKE THIS.

THE NEXT MORNING.
I AWOKE, DRIPPING IN SWEAT.
HOO.
MY HEAD WAS STILL FUZZY.
HAHH
... BUT I SLEPT SOUNDLY FOR A NIGHT AND FELT A BIT BETTER.
MAYBE THE MEDICINE I TOOK LAST NIGHT WORKED ...
COME TO THINK OF IT...
... I HAVEN'T HAD A THING TO EAT SINCE BREAKFAST YESTERDAY.
HUNGRY!

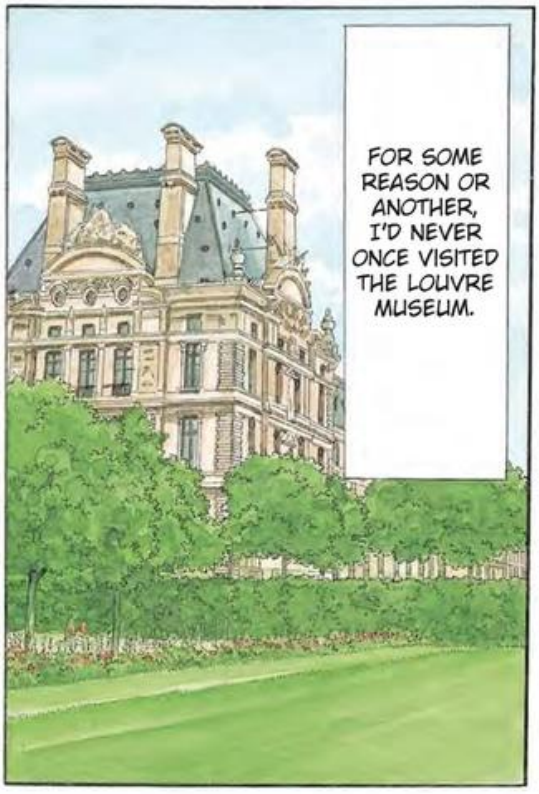
PHEW!
MANAGED TO BLURT OUT MY ORDER. JUST WONDER WHAT I'LL ACTUALLY GET.
CAFÉ AU LAIT, UN.
SALADE DE TOMATES, UN.
UMM, AND...
YES, OMELETTE HAM CHEESE, UN.
TRES BIEN.
HEH HEH!
FEELS KINDA LIKE...
... I'M COMING BACK TO LIFE.
MFF!
MM.
MM.
RHSS

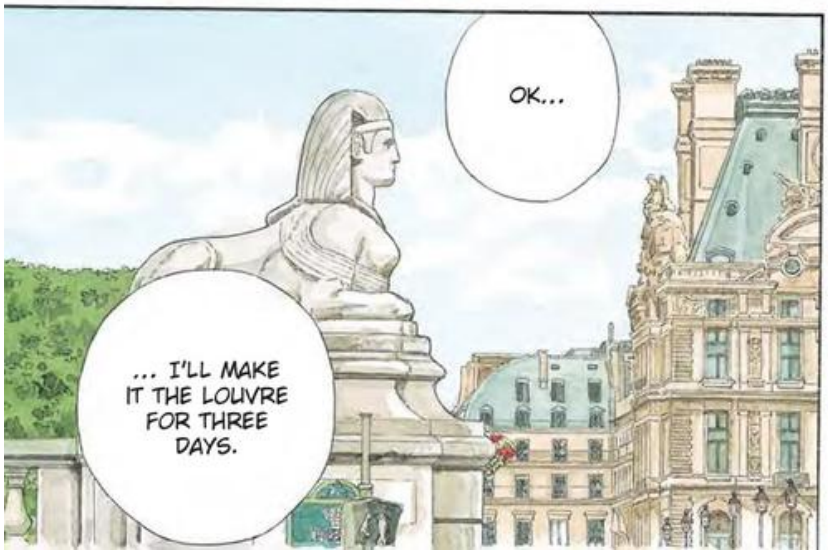
I DECIDED TO TRY GOING FOR A WALK.
MY PLAN HAD ACTUALLY BEEN TO GO AROUND SEEING PARIS' MUSEUMS THESE FIVE DAYS.

AFTER EATING, I FELT A LOT MORE RELAXED.

CAN'T BE SO LEISURELY ABOUT IT NOW!

WELL, I'VE HEARD YOU REALLY CAN'T SEE MUCH OF IT IN ONE OR TWO DAYS.


FOR SOME REASON OR ANOTHER, I'D NEVER ONCE VISITED THE LOUVRE MUSEUM.

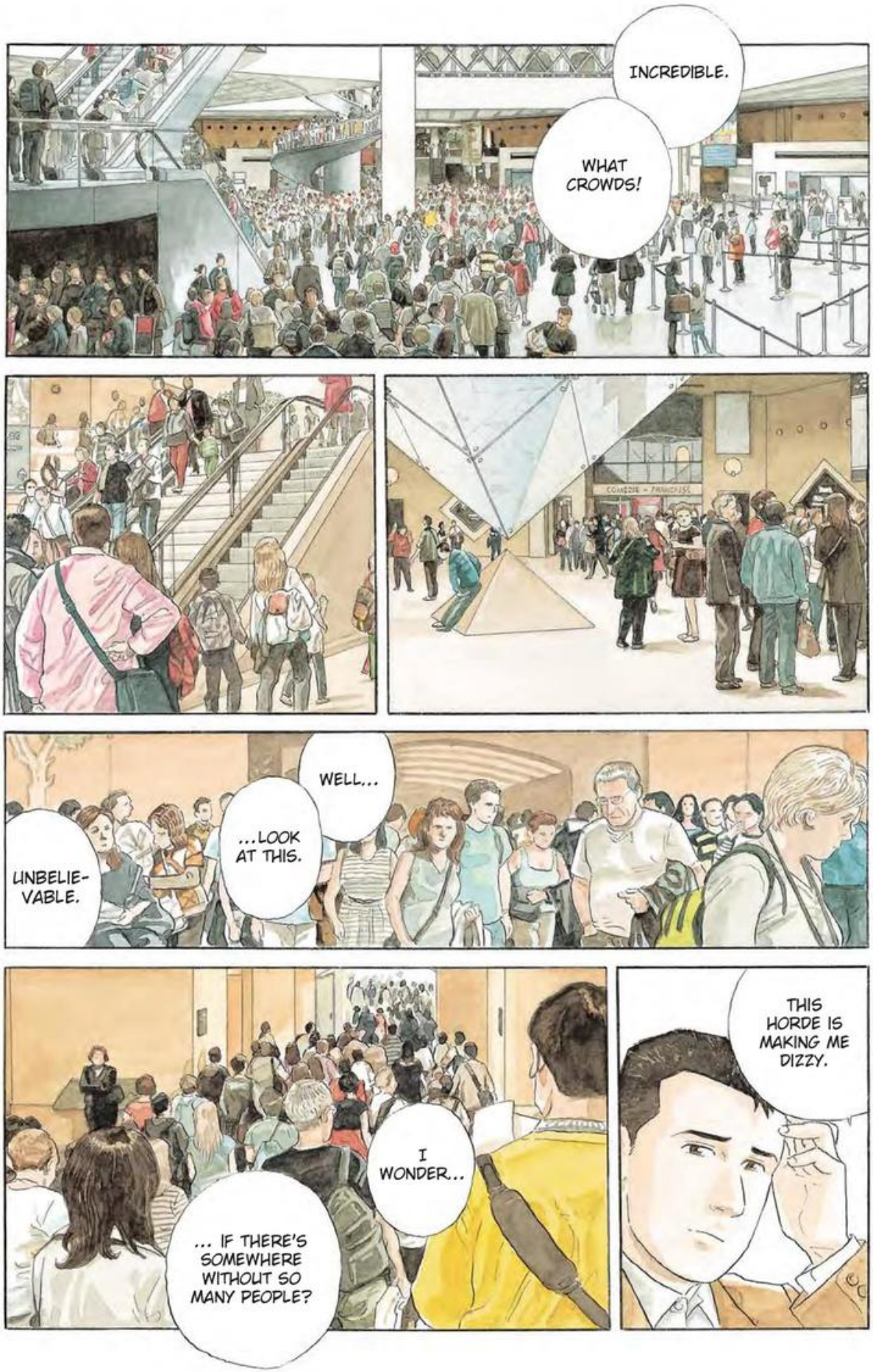

OK...
... I'LL MAKE IT THE LOUVRE FOR THREE DAYS.

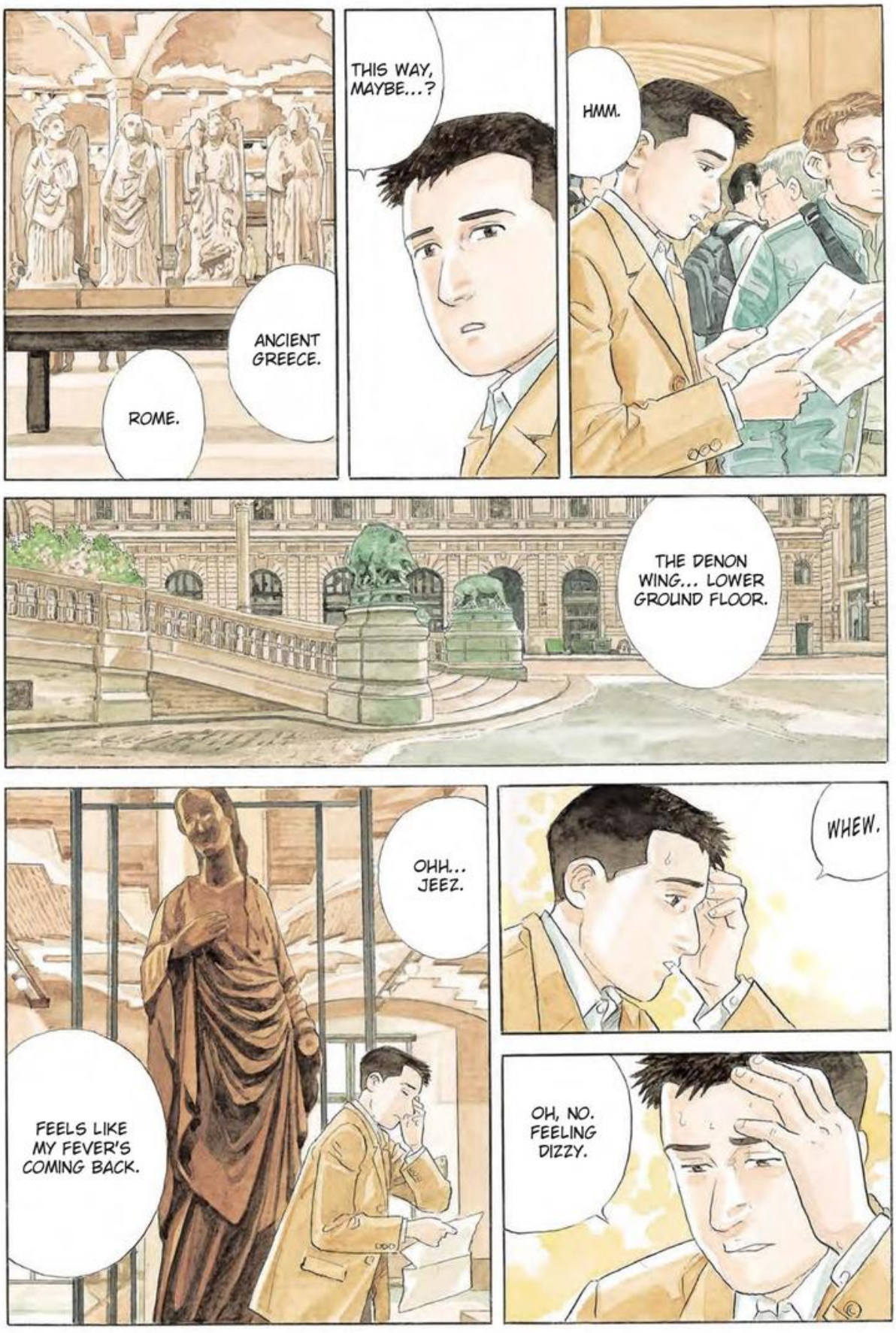
WHOA!

LOOKS LIKE HARD WORK JUST TO GET IN!

I'M AMAZED.

JUST LOOK...
...AT THOSE LINES!


INCREDIBLE.
WHAT CROWDS!
UNBELIE-VABLE.
...LOOK AT THIS.
WELL...
I WONDER...
... IF THERE'S SOMEWHERE WITHOUT SO MANY PEOPLE?
THIS HORDE IS MAKING ME DIZZY.


ANCIENT GREECE.
ROME.
THIS WAY, MAYBE...?
HMM.
THE DENON WING... LOWER GROUND FLOOR.
OHH... JEEZ.
FEELS LIKE MY FEVER'S COMING BACK.
WHEW.
OH, NO. FEELING DIZZY.

OH, NO...!
HEAD FEELS LIKE IT'S SWIMMING.
I GUESS...
... I REALLY SHOULD HAVE STAYED PUT IN THE HOTEL A WHILE LONGER.
HRRN...

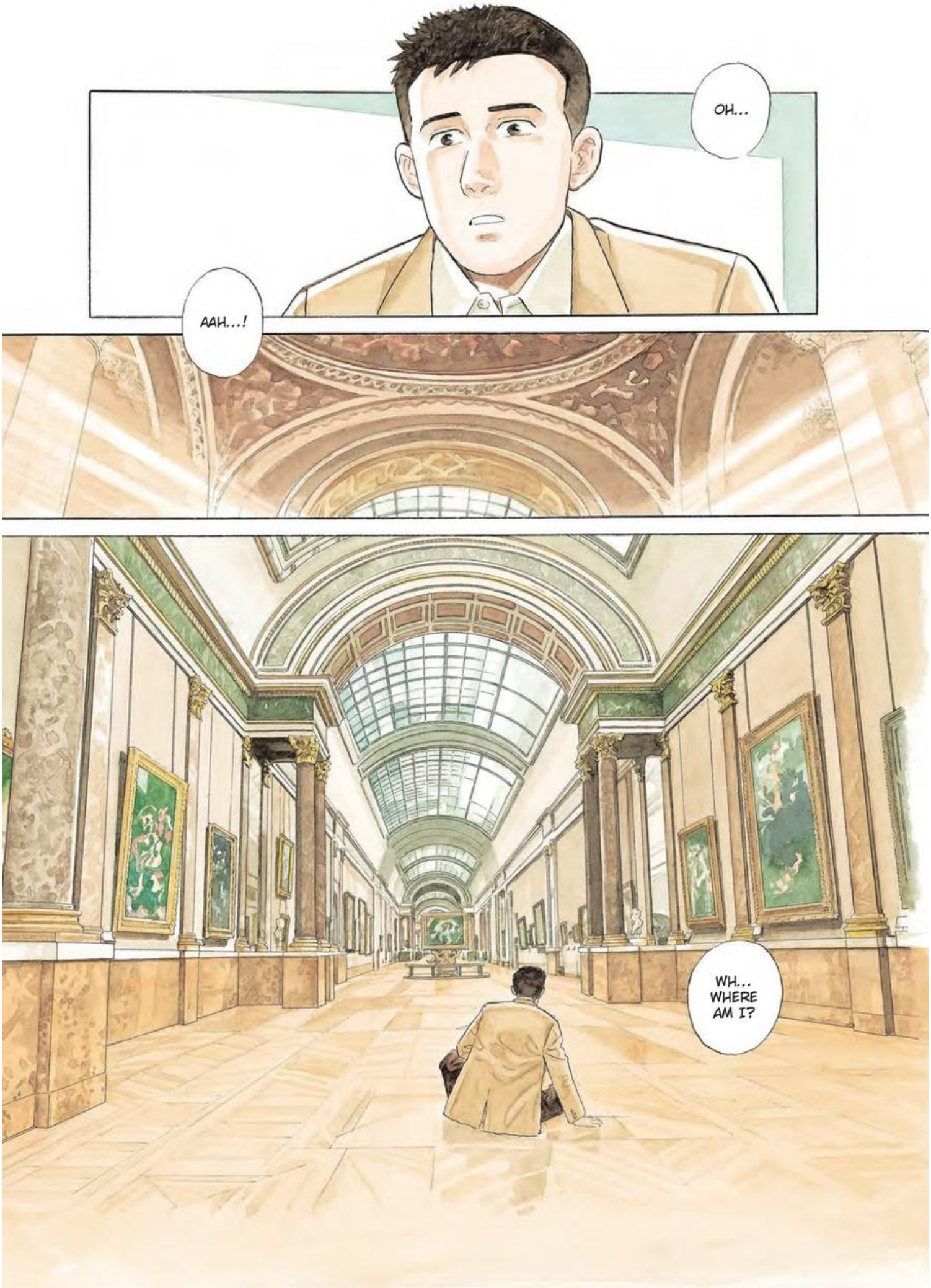
MONSIEUR.

NNF...

UHN...

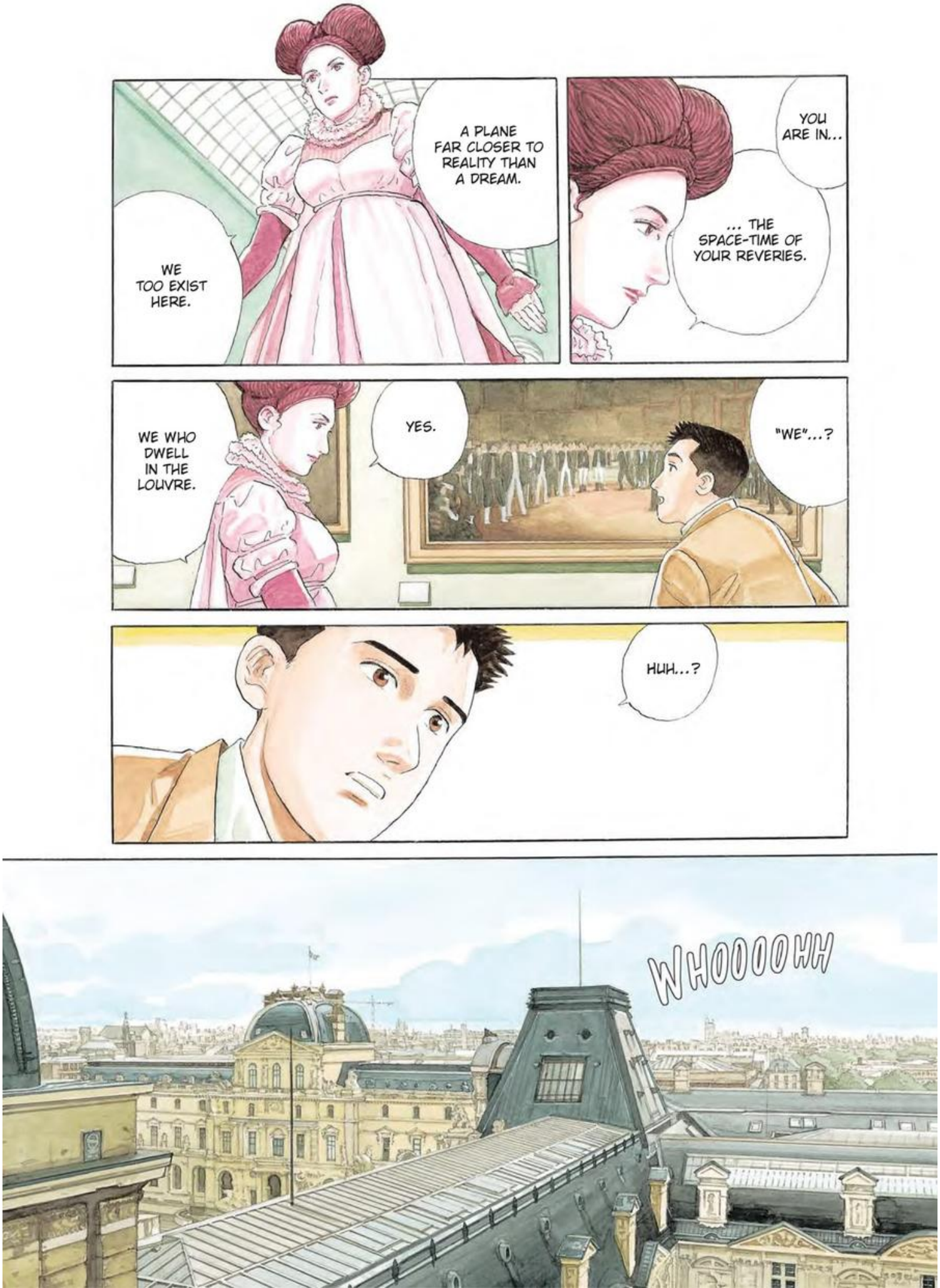
UHH...
NN.

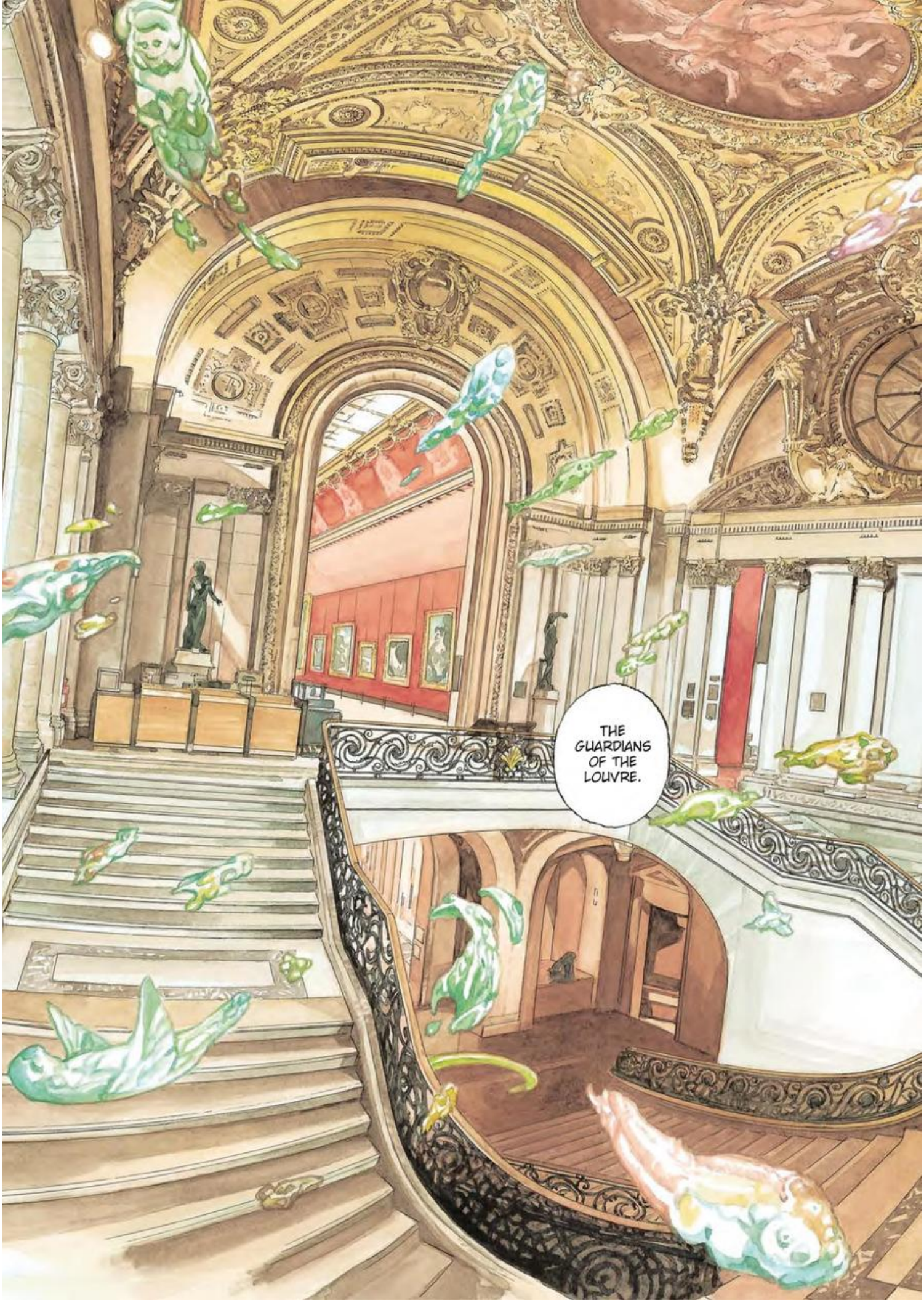
HNN
...
IS SOMETHING WRONG?
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

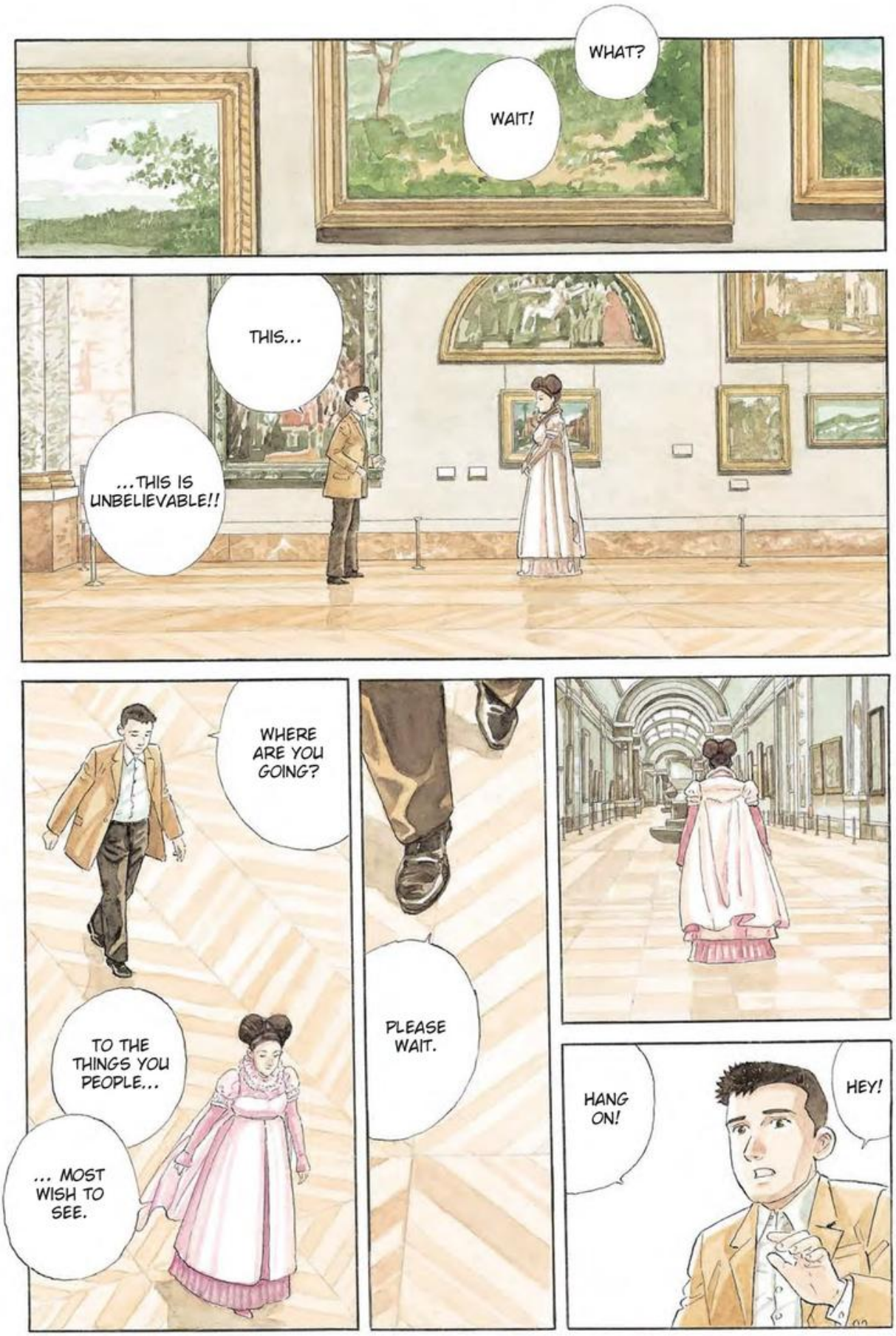

OH...
AAH...!
WH... WHERE AM I?

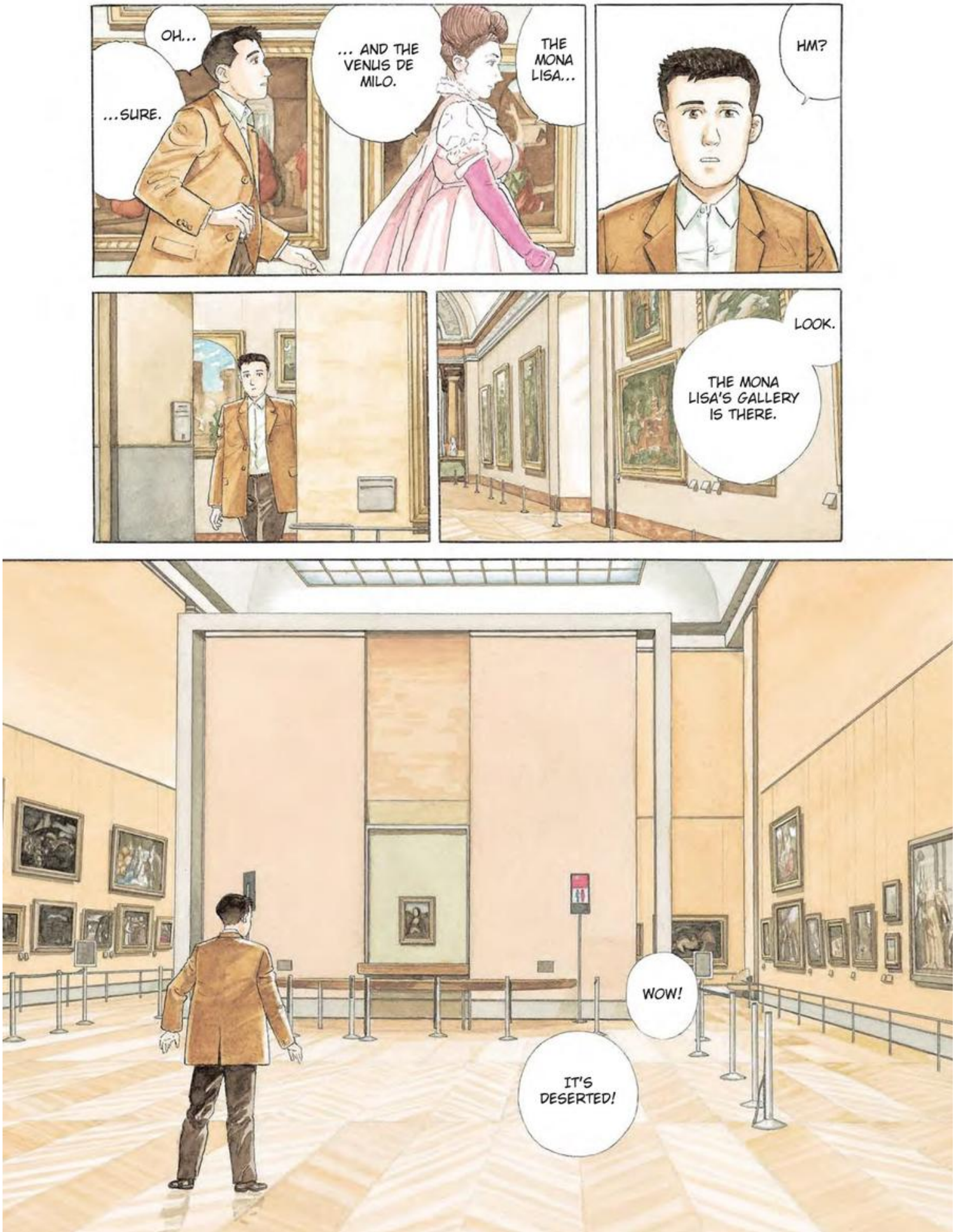
OH!
THAT'S RIGHT.
IN THE LOUVRE.
THE MUSEUM.
...
I'M SURE I WAS...
... IN THE LOWER GROUND FLOOR OF THE DENON WING...?
BUT...
... WHEN DID I -- ?
HOW STRANGE.
IS IT THE FEVER?
MY HEAD'S STILL SPINNING.

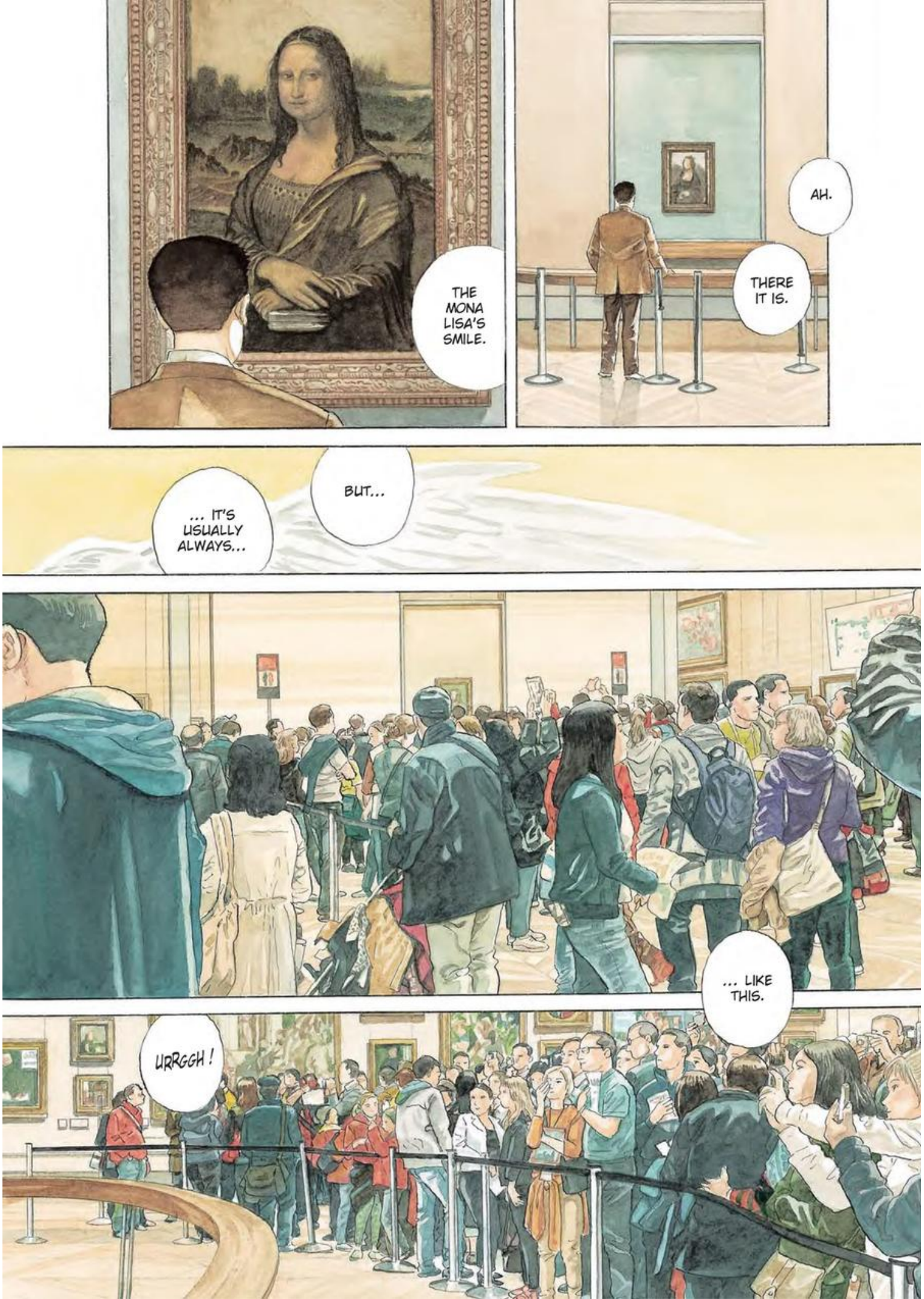
ALL THOSE CROWDS BEFORE,...
...THEY'VE GONE!
AM I IMAGINING IT?
THE AIR SMELLS DIFFERENT.
BUT...
... YOU MIGHT SAY IT'S A STATE VERY MUCH RESEMBLING ONE.
HUH?
NO.
THIS IS NOT A DREAM.
JUST WHAT --
HAS HAPPENED TO ME?
IS THIS... A DREAM?

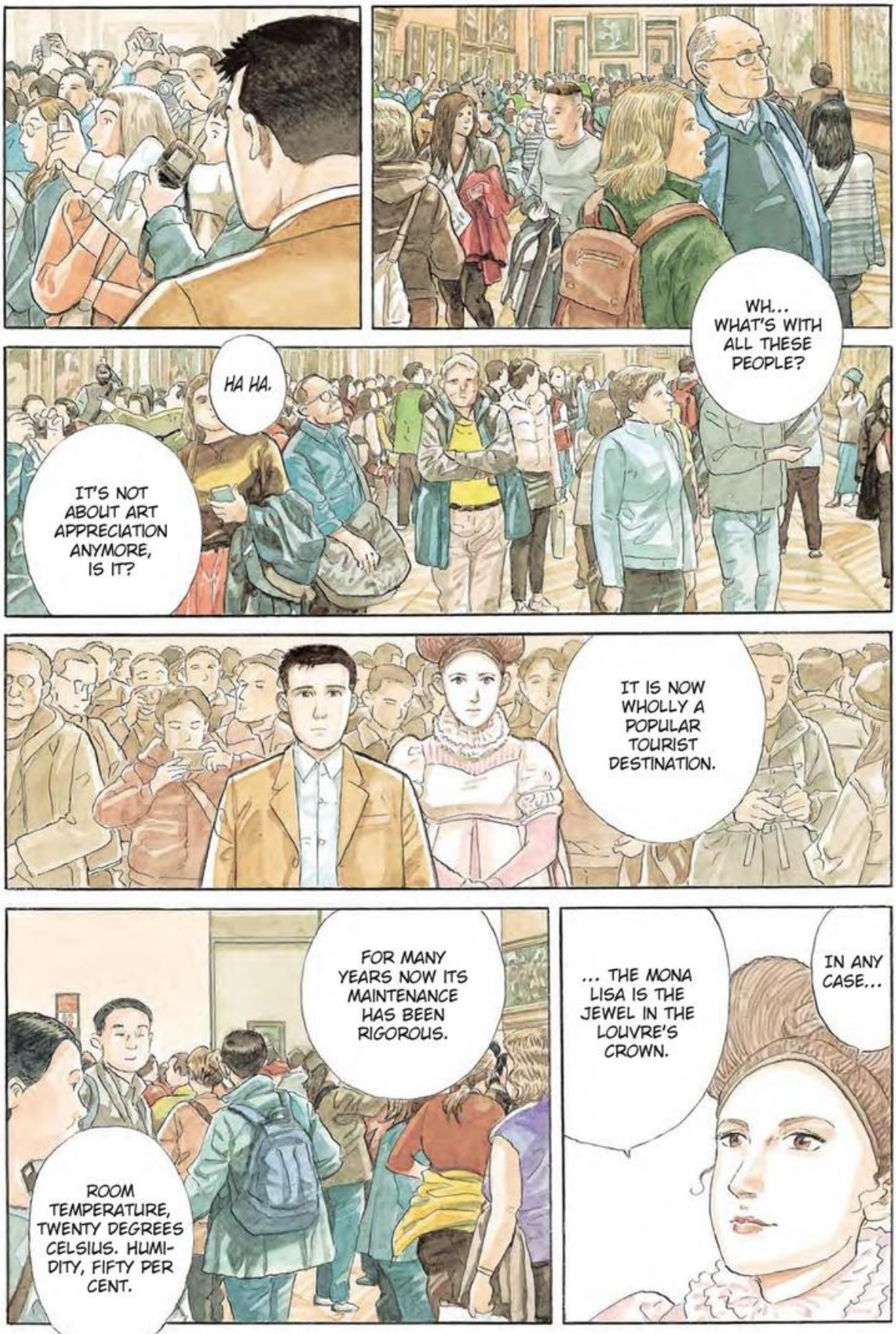

A PLANE FAR CLOSER TO REALITY THAN A DREAM.
WE TOO EXIST HERE.
YOU ARE IN...
... THE SPACE-TIME OF YOUR REVERIES.
WE WHO DWELL IN THE LOUVRE.
YES.
"WE"...?
HUH...?
WHOOOOHH


THE GUARDIANS OF THE LOUVRE.

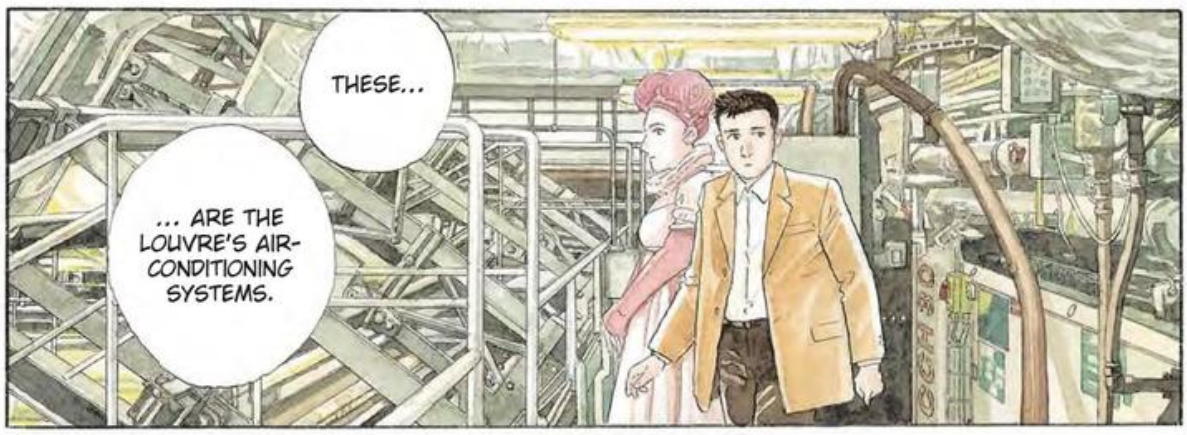

WHAT?
WAIT!
THIS...
...THIS IS UNBELIEVABLE!!
WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
TO THE THINGS YOU PEOPLE...
... MOST WISH TO SEE.
PLEASE WAIT.
HANG ON!
HEY!

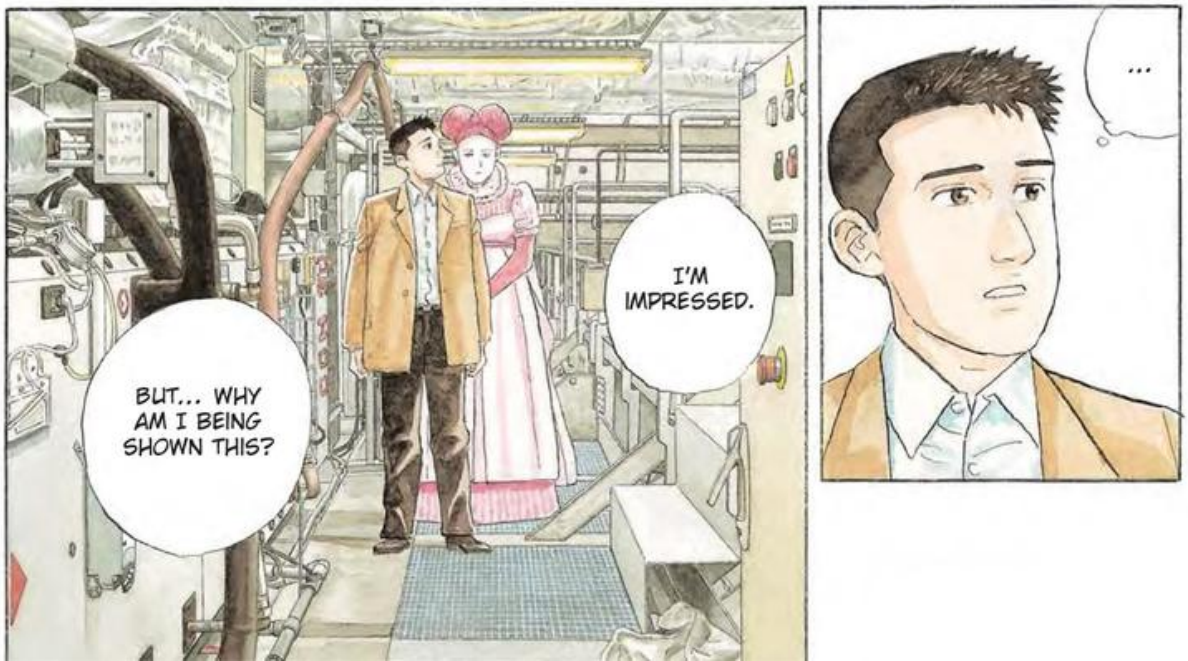

OH...
...SURE.
... AND THE VENUS DE MILO.
THE MONA LISA...
HM?
LOOK.
THE MONA LISA'S GALLERY IS THERE.
WOW!
IT'S DESERTED!


THE MONA LISA'S SMILE.
AH.
THERE IT IS.
BUT...
... IT'S USUALLY ALWAYS...
... LIKE THIS.
URRGGH !


WH... WHAT'S WITH ALL THESE PEOPLE?
HA HA.
IT'S NOT ABOUT ART APPRECIATION ANYMORE, IS IT?
IT IS NOW WHOLLY A POPULAR TOURIST DESTINATION.
FOR MANY YEARS NOW ITS MAINTENANCE HAS BEEN RIGOROUS.
ROOM TEMPERATURE, TWENTY DEGREES CELSIUS. HUMIDITY, FIFTY PER CENT.
... THE MONA LISA IS THE JEWEL IN THE LOUVRE'S CROWN.
IN ANY CASE...

OH...!


THESE...
... ARE THE LOUVRE'S AIR-CONDITIONING SYSTEMS.


I'M IMPRESSED.
BUT... WHY AM I BEING SHOWN THIS?

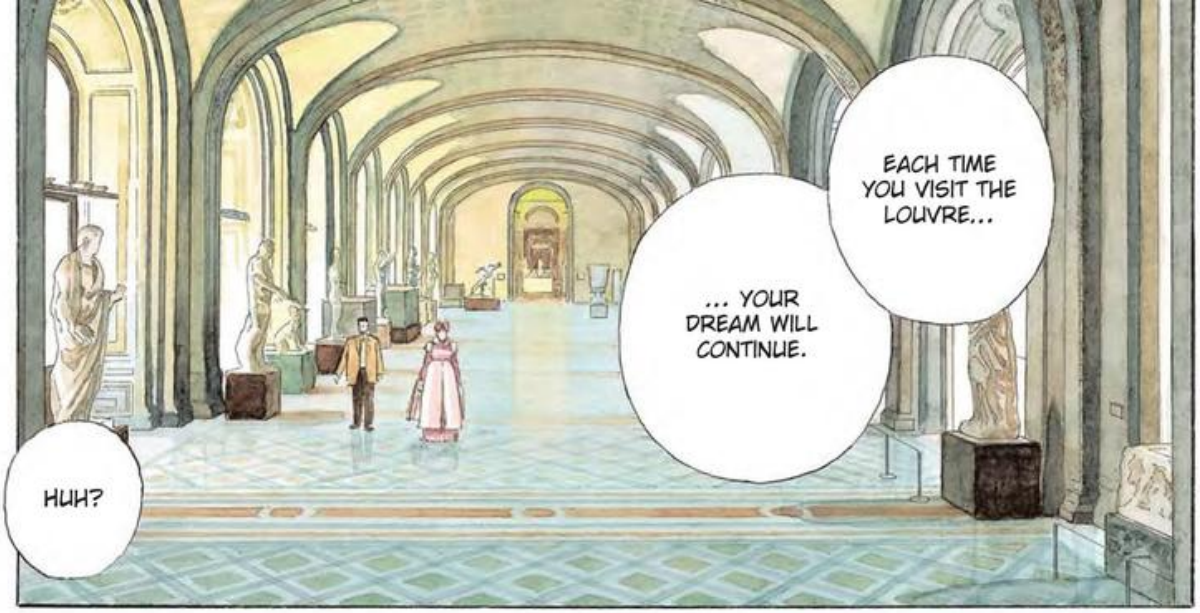
...

THE LOUVRE...

... IS A LABYRINTH...

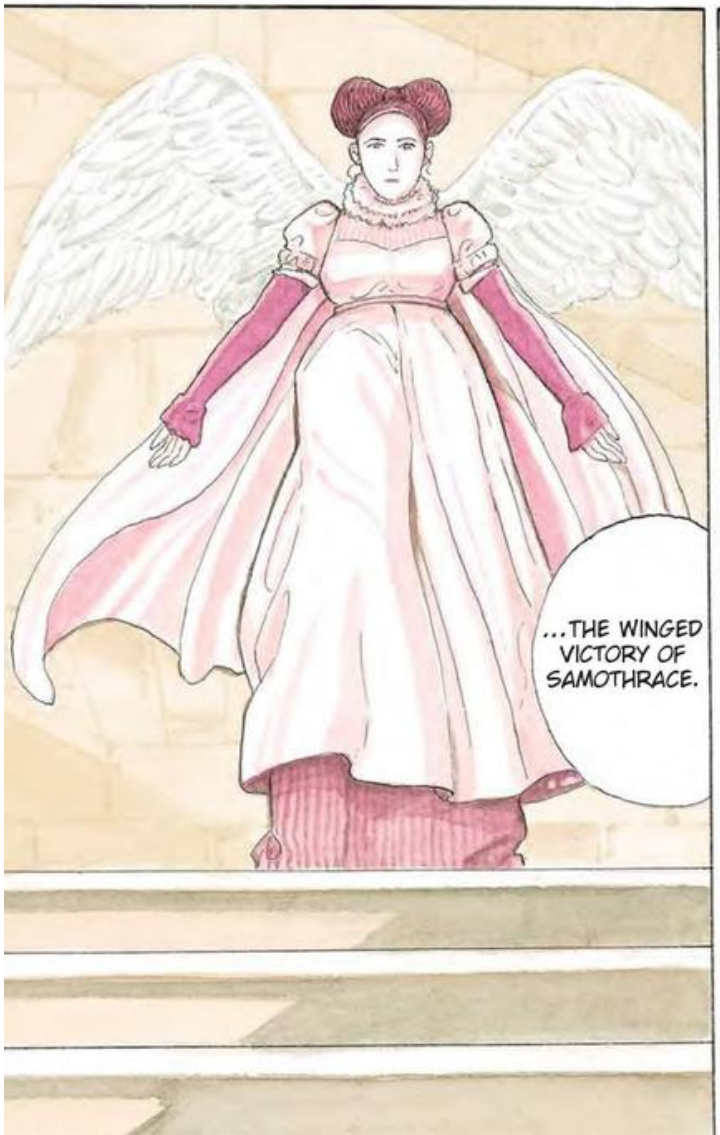
... EXISTING IN THE SPACE BETWEEN DREAM AND REALITY.

MANY WORKS OF ART HAVE BEEN COLLECTED HERE...
... OVER A PERIOD SO LONG IT WOULD MAKE YOU LIGHT-HEADED. PIECES FROM ANTIQUITY THROUGH THE 19TH CENTURY.
WITHIN EACH AND EVERY ONE OF THEM RESIDES A SOUL.
ALL OF THEM, WHETHER THEY ARE ON DISPLAY OR NOT.
OVER HUNDREDS OF YEARS, I HAVE SEEN SO MANY WORKS HERE.
AND WE ARE HERE, CONTINUING TO STAND GUARD.


EACH TIME YOU VISIT THE LOUVRE...
... YOUR DREAM WILL CONTINUE.
HUH?

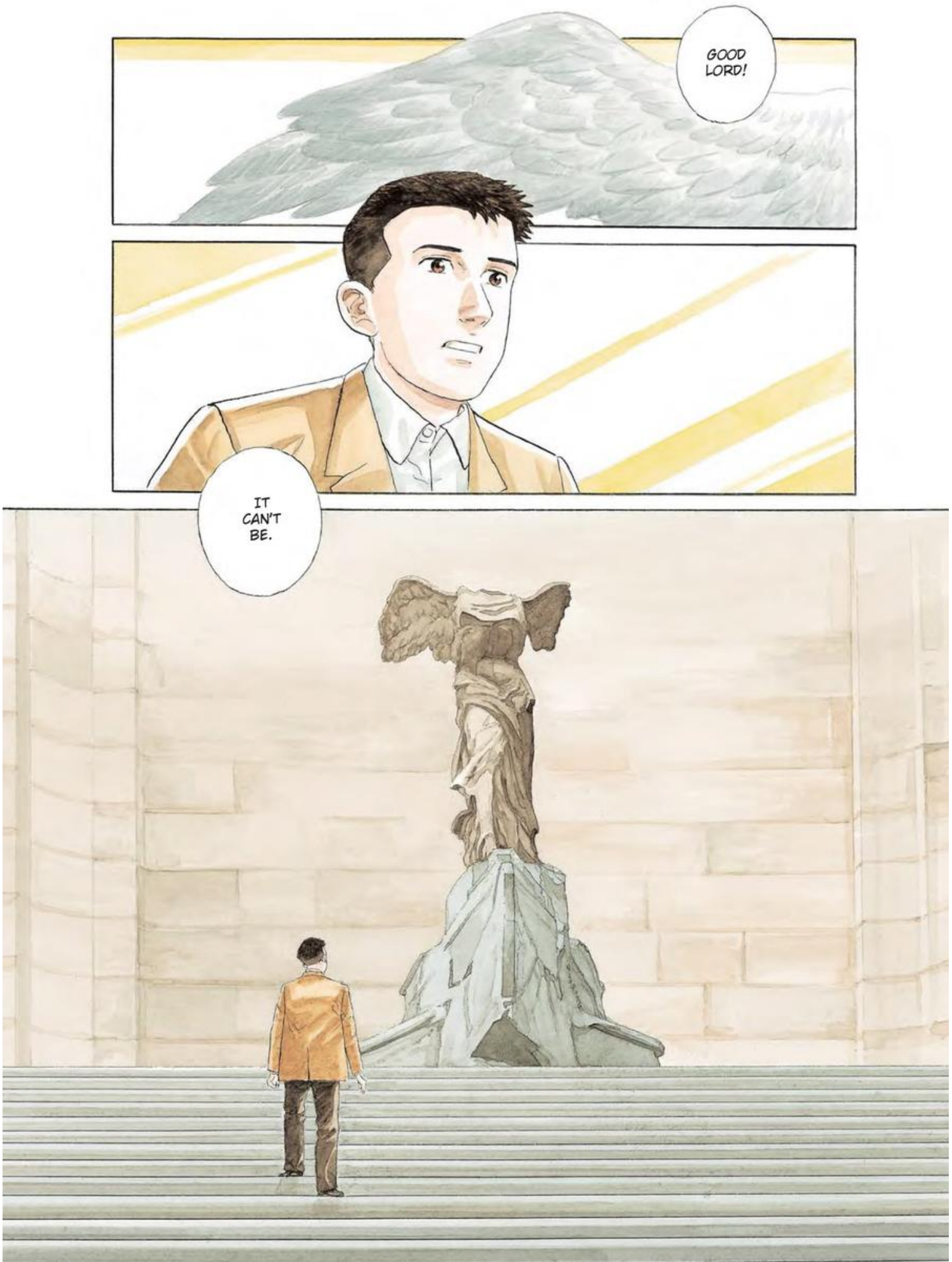
HA HA.

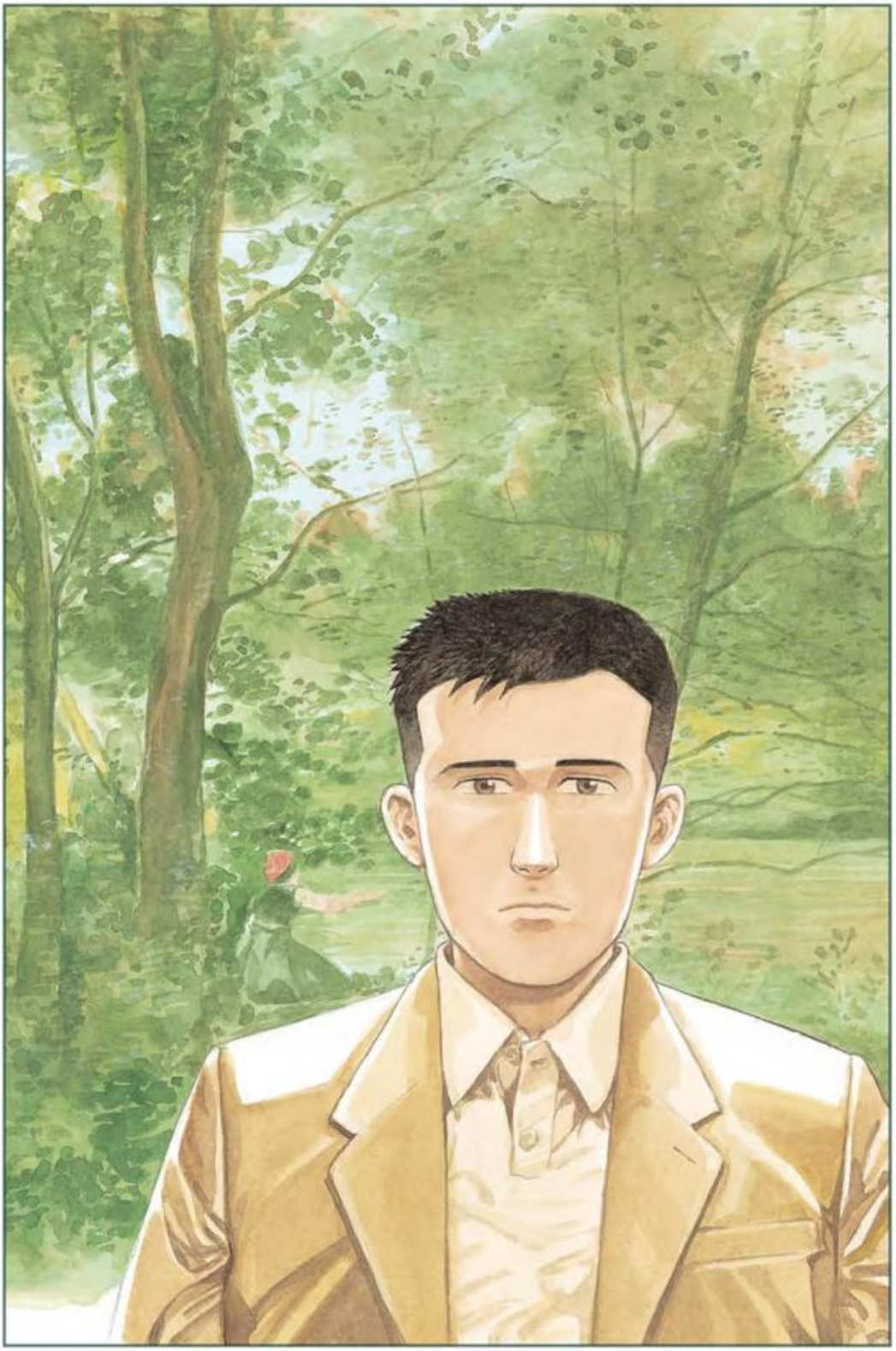
UH, SAY...
...WAIT!


...THE WINGED VICTORY OF SAMOTHRACE.

VICTORY ...

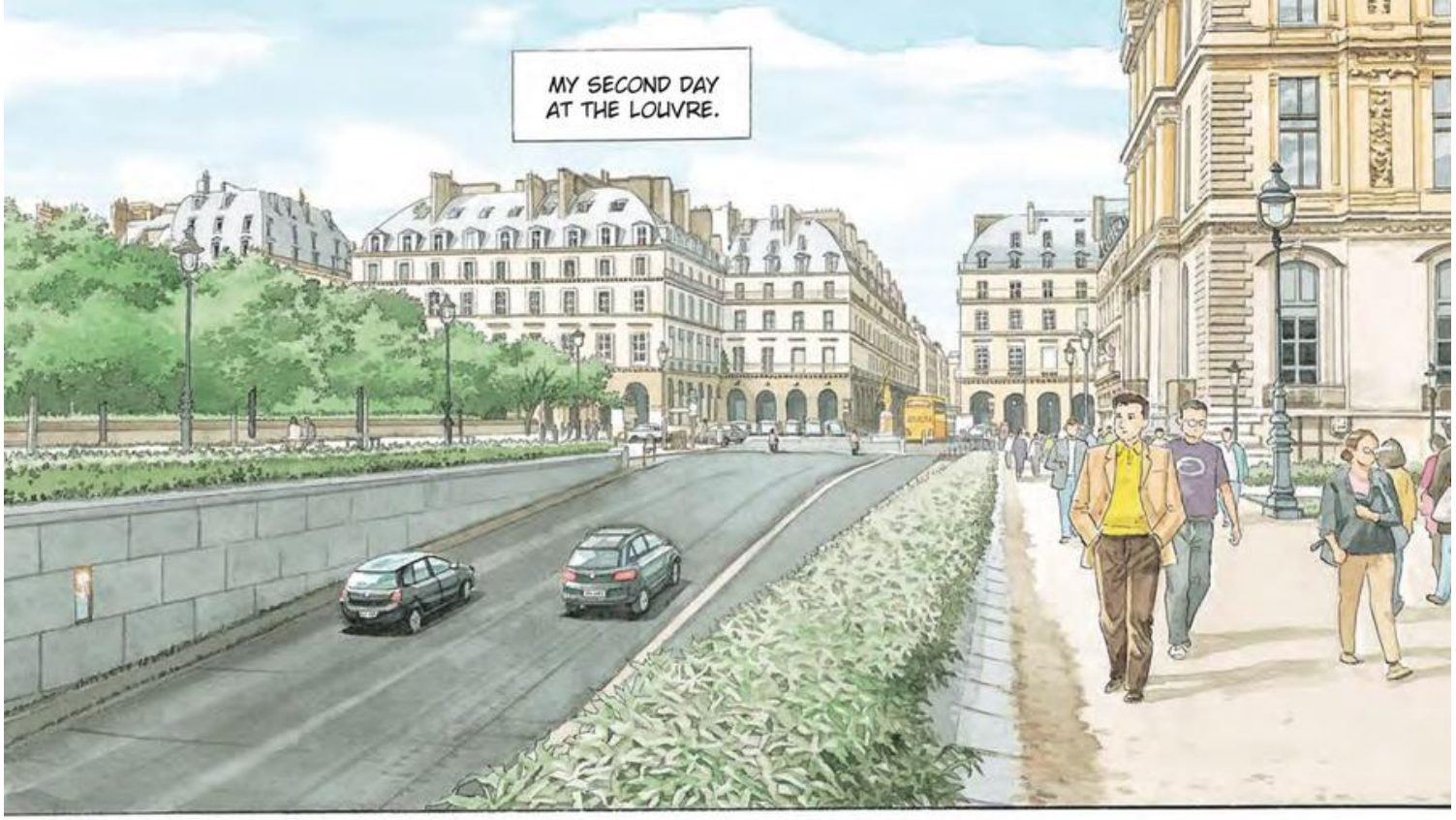
JUST WHO,...
...WHO ARE YOU?


GOOD LORD!
IT CAN'T BE.



CHAPTER 2

COROT'S FOREST


MY SECOND DAY AT THE LOUVRE.

FELT HAZY.

...I LOOKED UP AT THE SKY.

MY HEAD STILL FELT LIKE IT DID THE DAY BEFORE...
AND AS I WONDERED JUST WHAT THAT MIRACULOUS EXPERIENCE WAS...

Because he was most faithful in his representation of nature…

…so did he become the most free and poetic of landscape painters.

I do adore Corot's paintings. And further I do venerate the painter himself.

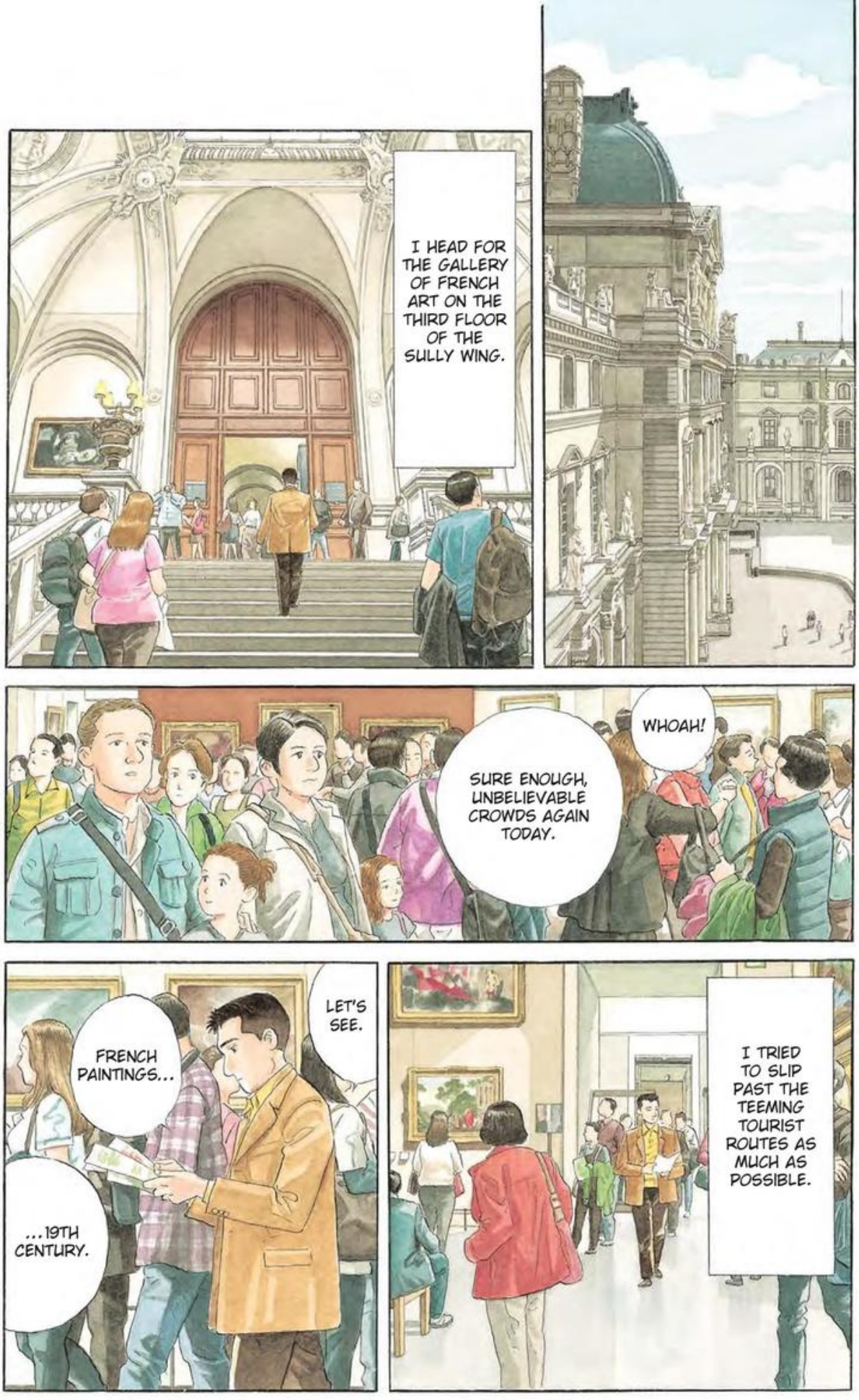
SUDDENLY
...

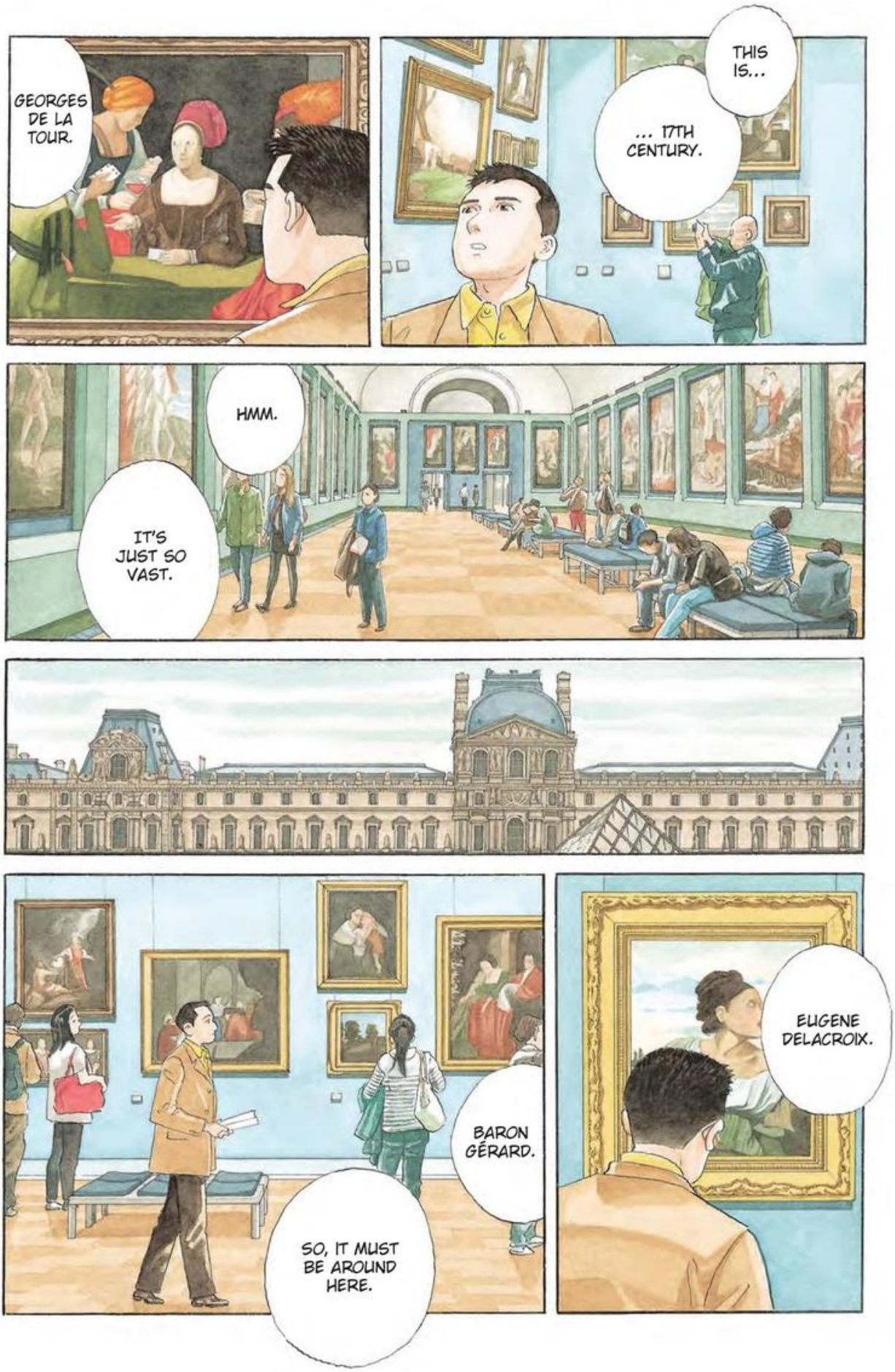
IT WAS FROM AN ESSAY ENTITLED "THE LANDSCAPE ARTIST COROT."
... I RECOLLECT A PASSAGE I READ WHEN I WAS A STUDENT IN "NATURE AND MAN" BY MEIJI LITERARY FIGURE ROKA TOKUTOMI.

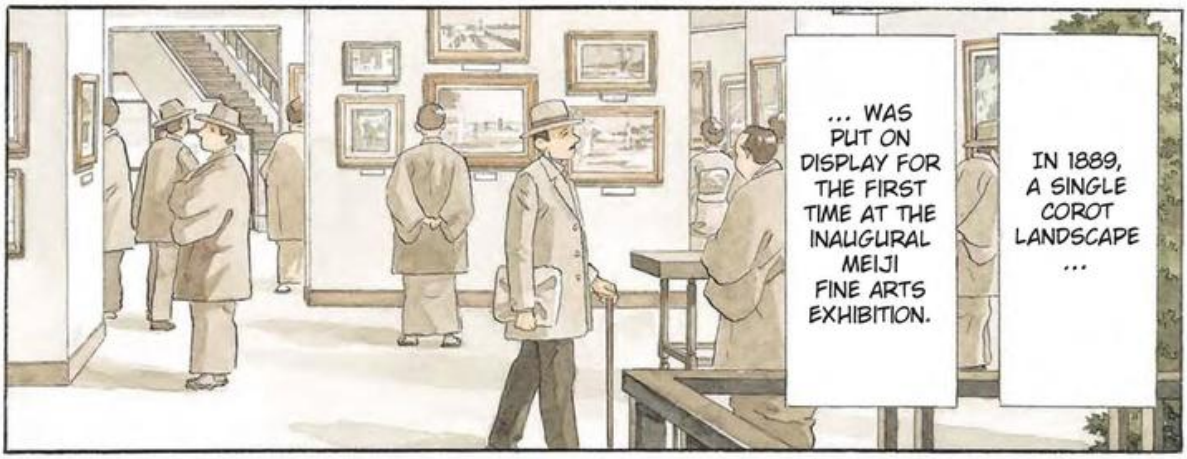
CAMILLE COROT... HUH.

MOREOVER..
...WHEN, WHERE AND HOW HAD HE DISCOVERED COROT'S WORKS?

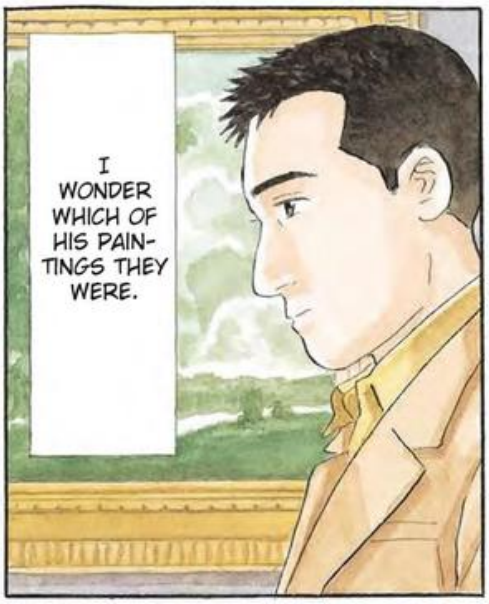
JUST WHAT MATERIAL DID ROKA HAVE AVAILABLE TO WRITE THAT PIECE?
自然と人生


I HEAD FOR THE GALLERY OF FRENCH ART ON THE THIRD FLOOR OF THE SULLY WING.
WHOAH!
SURE ENOUGH, UNBELIEVABLE CROWDS AGAIN TODAY.
LET'S SEE.
FRENCH PAINTINGS...
...19TH CENTURY.
I TRIED TO SLIP PAST THE TEEMING TOURIST ROUTES AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE.

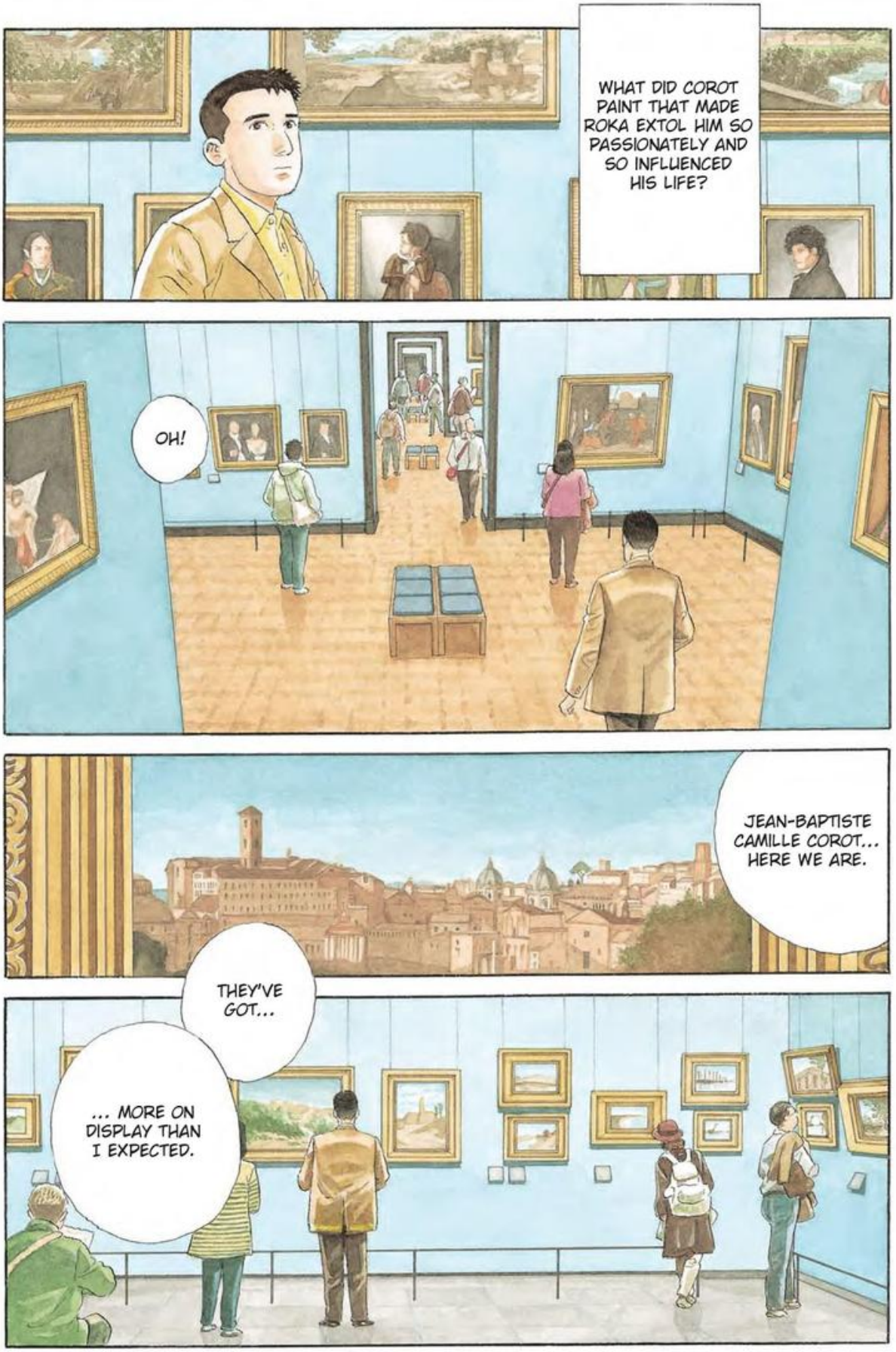

GEORGES DE LA TOUR.
THIS IS...
... 17TH CENTURY.
HMM.
IT'S JUST SO VAST.
BARON GÉRARD.
SO, IT MUST BE AROUND HERE.
EUGENE DELACROIX.

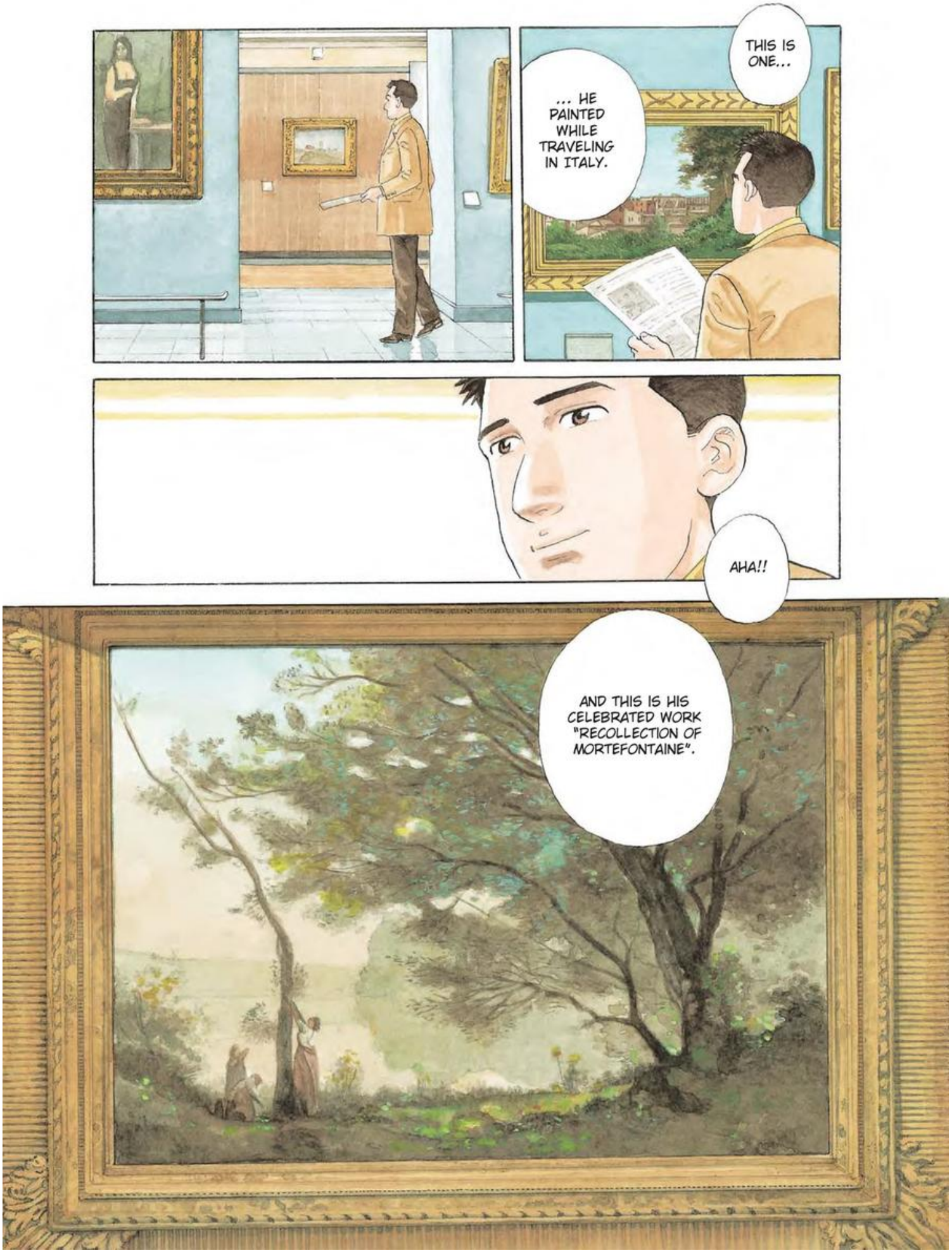

IN 1889, A SINGLE COROT LANDSCAPE ...
... WAS PUT ON DISPLAY FOR THE FIRST TIME AT THE INAUGURAL MEIJI FINE ARTS EXHIBITION.

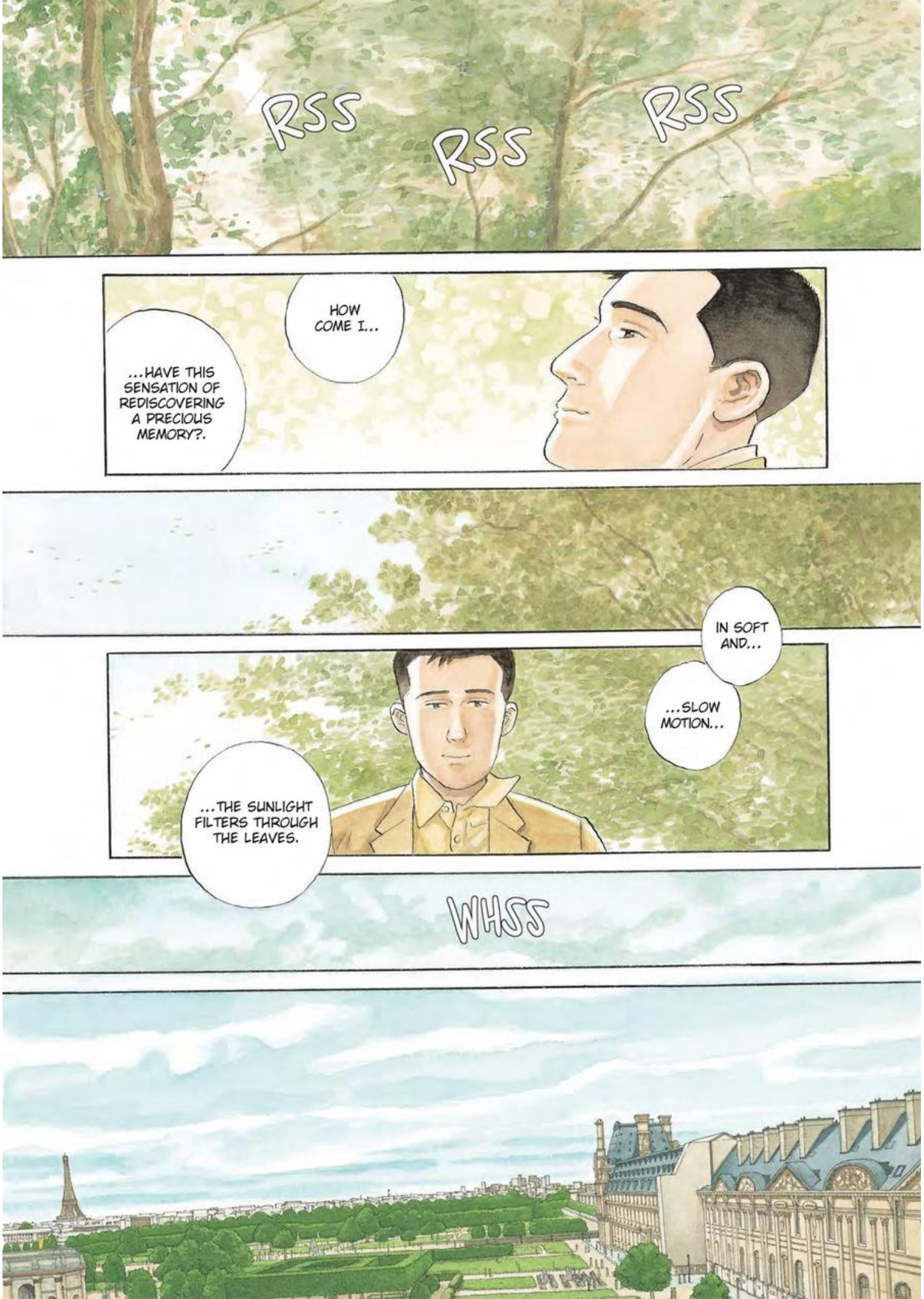
BUT COROT'S ART ONLY BECAME ESTEEMED IN JAPAN AFTER 1897.


I WONDER WHICH OF HIS PAIN-TINGS THEY WERE.

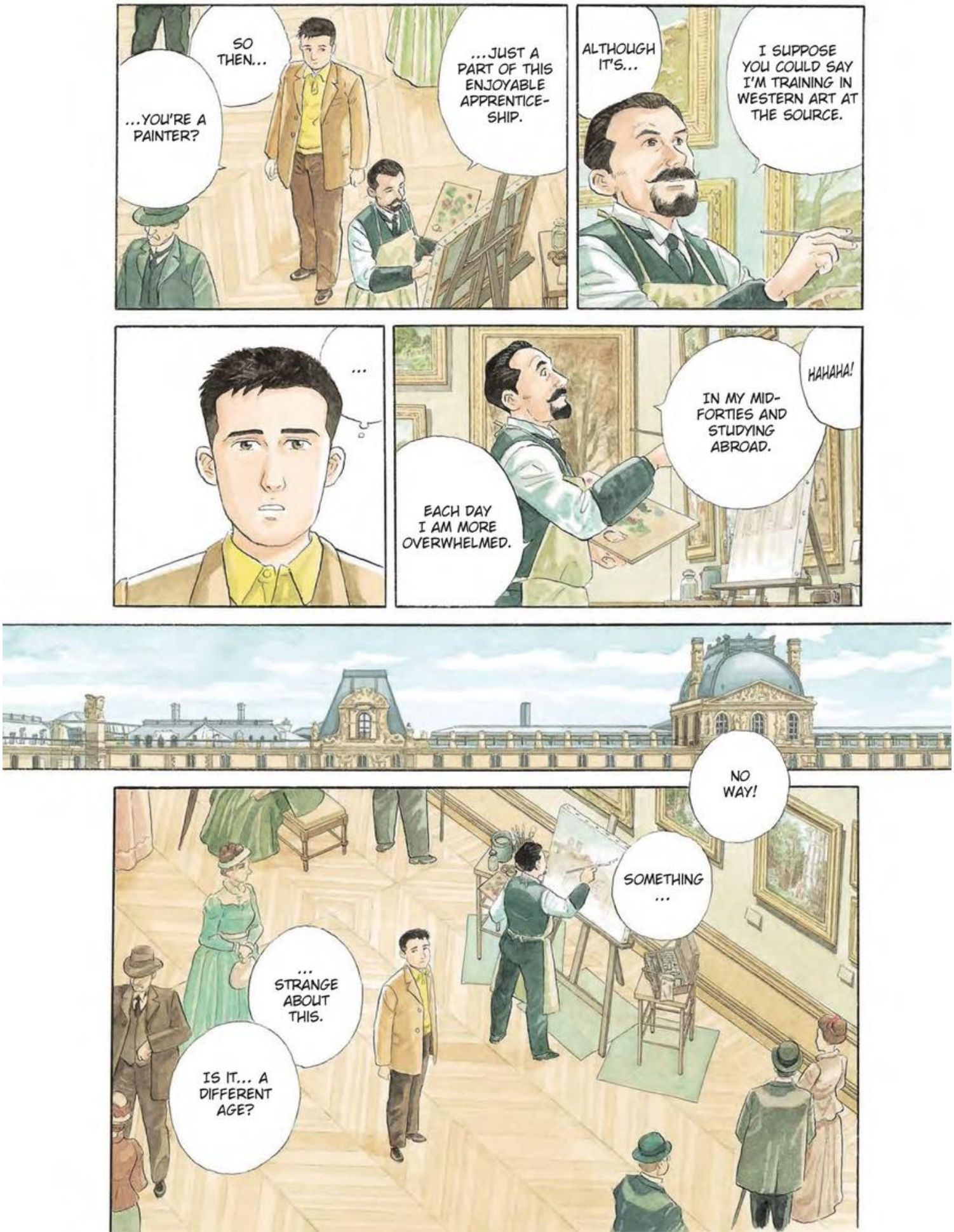
LATER, IN 1903 AT THE FIFTH MEIJI FINE ARTS EXHIBIT, WORKS BY COURBET AND SISLEY AS WELL AS COROT WERE SHOWN.


WHAT DID COROT PAINT THAT MADE ROKA EXTOL HIM SO PASSIONATELY AND SO INFLUENCED HIS LIFE?
OH!
JEAN-BAPTISTE CAMILLE COROT... HERE WE ARE.
THEY'VE GOT...
... MORE ON DISPLAY THAN I EXPECTED.


THIS IS ONE...
... HE PAINTED WHILE TRAVELING IN ITALY.
AHA!!
AND THIS IS HIS CELEBRATED WORK "RECOLLECTION OF MORTEFONTAINE".


RSS
RSS
RSS
HOW COME I...
...HAVE THIS SENSATION OF REDISCOVERING A PRECIOUS MEMORY?.
IN SOFT AND...
...SLOW MOTION...
...THE SUNLIGHT FILTERS THROUGH THE LEAVES.
WHSS

IT'S A GOOD PAINTING, ISN'T IT?
WONDERFUL.
IT LURES THOSE WHO SEE IT INTO A NOSTALGIC WORLD.
IT MAKES ME WANT TO STARE AT IT FOREVER.
...
... IT'S SERENE AND PLEASANT.
FROM A DISTANCE...
YES.
I COME TO THE LOUVRE ALMOST EVERY DAY.
... JAPANESE?
ARE YOU...
...
AND PAINT...
... REPRO-DUCTIONS.

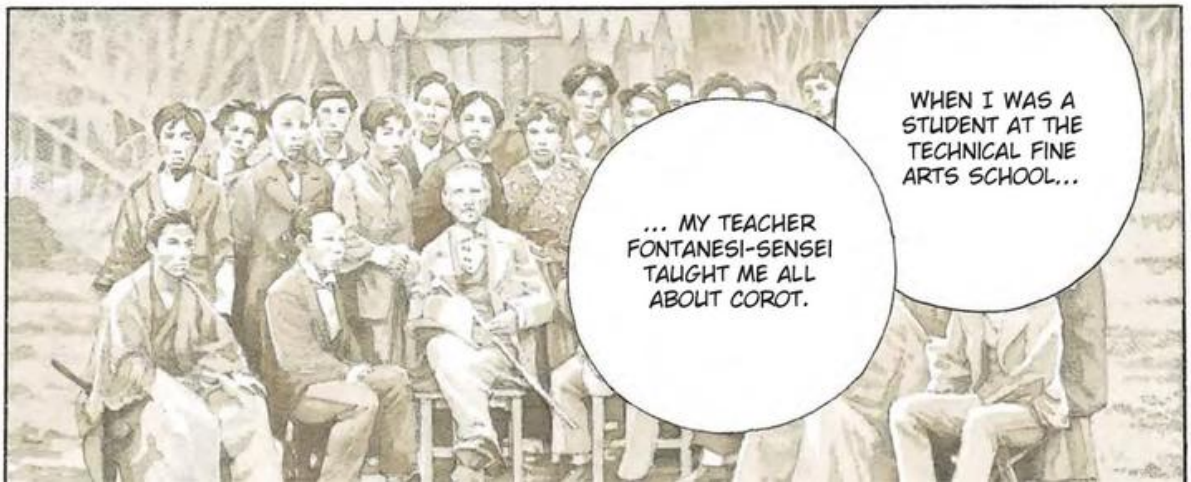

SO THEN...
...YOU'RE A PAINTER?
...JUST A PART OF THIS ENJOYABLE APPRENTICE-SHIP.
ALTHOUGH IT'S...
I SUPPOSE YOU COULD SAY I'M TRAINING IN WESTERN ART AT THE SOURCE.
...
HAHAHA!
IN MY MID-FORTIES AND STUDYING ABROAD.
EACH DAY I AM MORE OVERWHELMED.
NO WAY!
SOMETHING ...
... STRANGE ABOUT THIS.
IS IT... A DIFFERENT AGE?

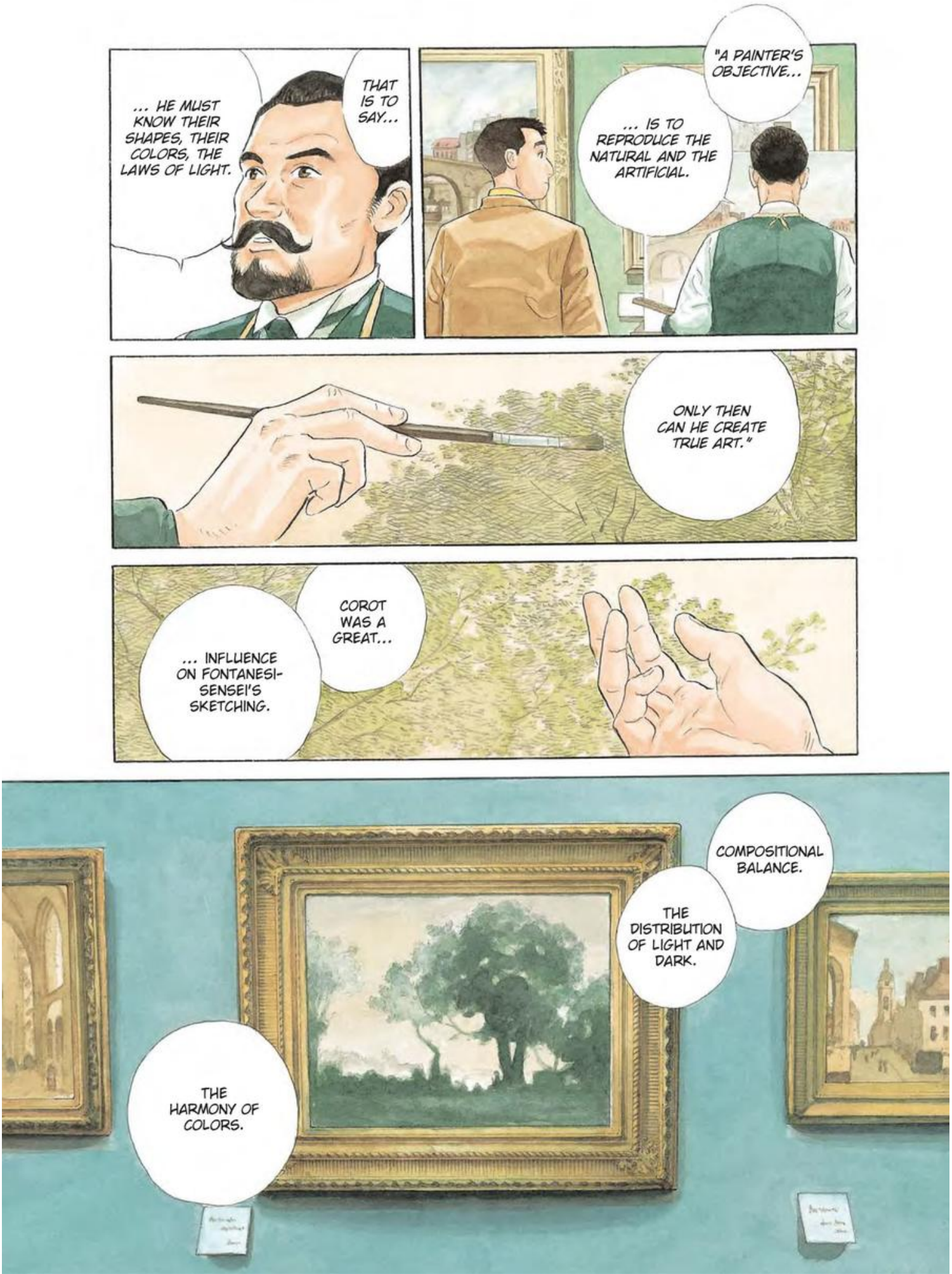
WHEN DID I...?
IS IT... THE MAGIC OF THE LOUVRE AGAIN?

OH!
WHAT'S WRONG?
ARE YOU UNWELL...?
NO FINE, FINE.

RSS RSS RSS

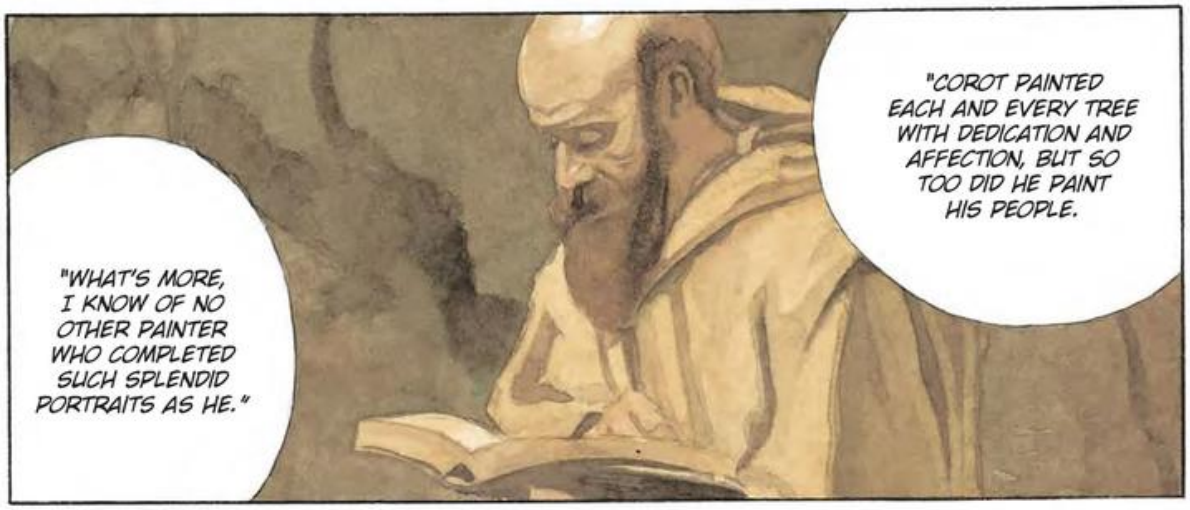
COROT IS THE PAINTER I REVERE ABOVE ALL OTHERS.


WHEN I WAS A STUDENT AT THE TECHNICAL FINE ARTS SCHOOL...
... MY TEACHER FONTANESI-SENSEI TAUGHT ME ALL ABOUT COROT.


... HE MUST KNOW THEIR SHAPES, THEIR COLORS, THE LAWS OF LIGHT.
THAT IS TO SAY...
"A PAINTER'S OBJECTIVE...
... IS TO REPRODUCE THE NATURAL AND THE ARTIFICIAL.
ONLY THEN CAN HE CREATE TRUE ART."
... INFLUENCE ON FONTANESI-SENSEI'S SKETCHING.
COROT WAS A GREAT...
THE HARMONY OF COLORS.
THE DISTRIBUTION OF LIGHT AND DARK.
COMPOSITIONAL BALANCE.

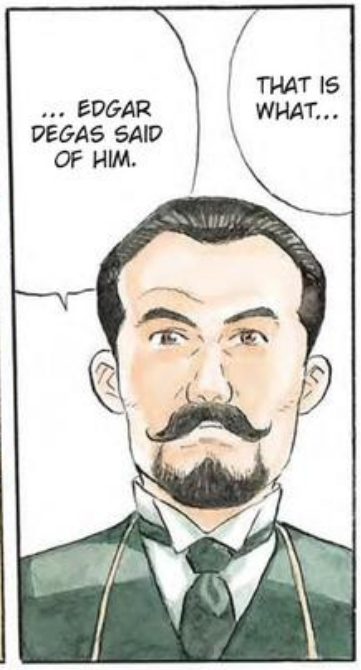
A MASTERPIECE EQUAL TO DA VINCI'S "MONA LISA".
SO I BELIEVE.

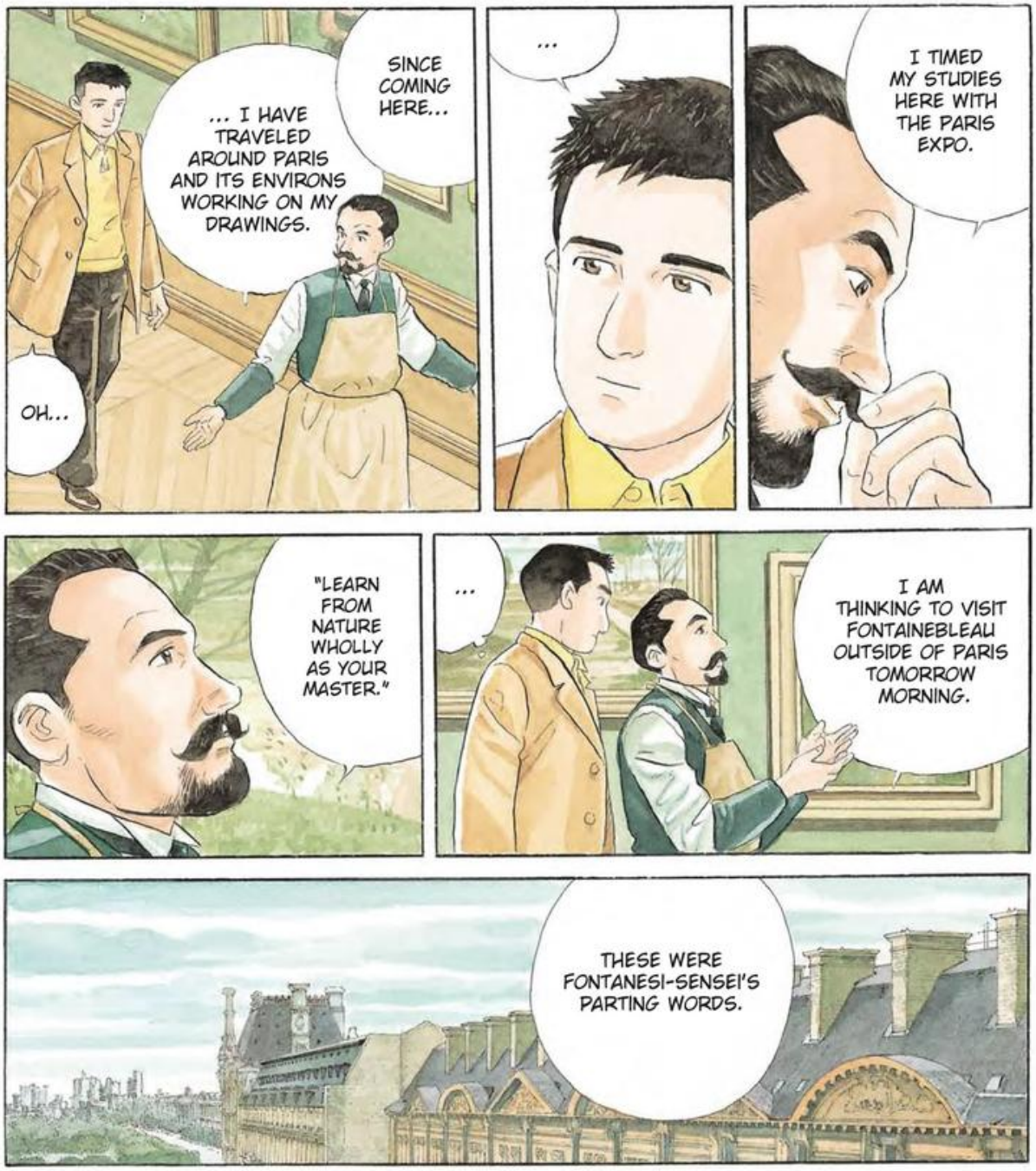
HERE'S "WOMAN WITH A PEARL."


"COROT PAINTED EACH AND EVERY TREE WITH DEDICATION AND AFFECTION, BUT SO TOO DID HE PAINT HIS PEOPLE.
"WHAT'S MORE, I KNOW OF NO OTHER PAINTER WHO COMPLETED SUCH SPLENDID PORTRAITS AS HE."

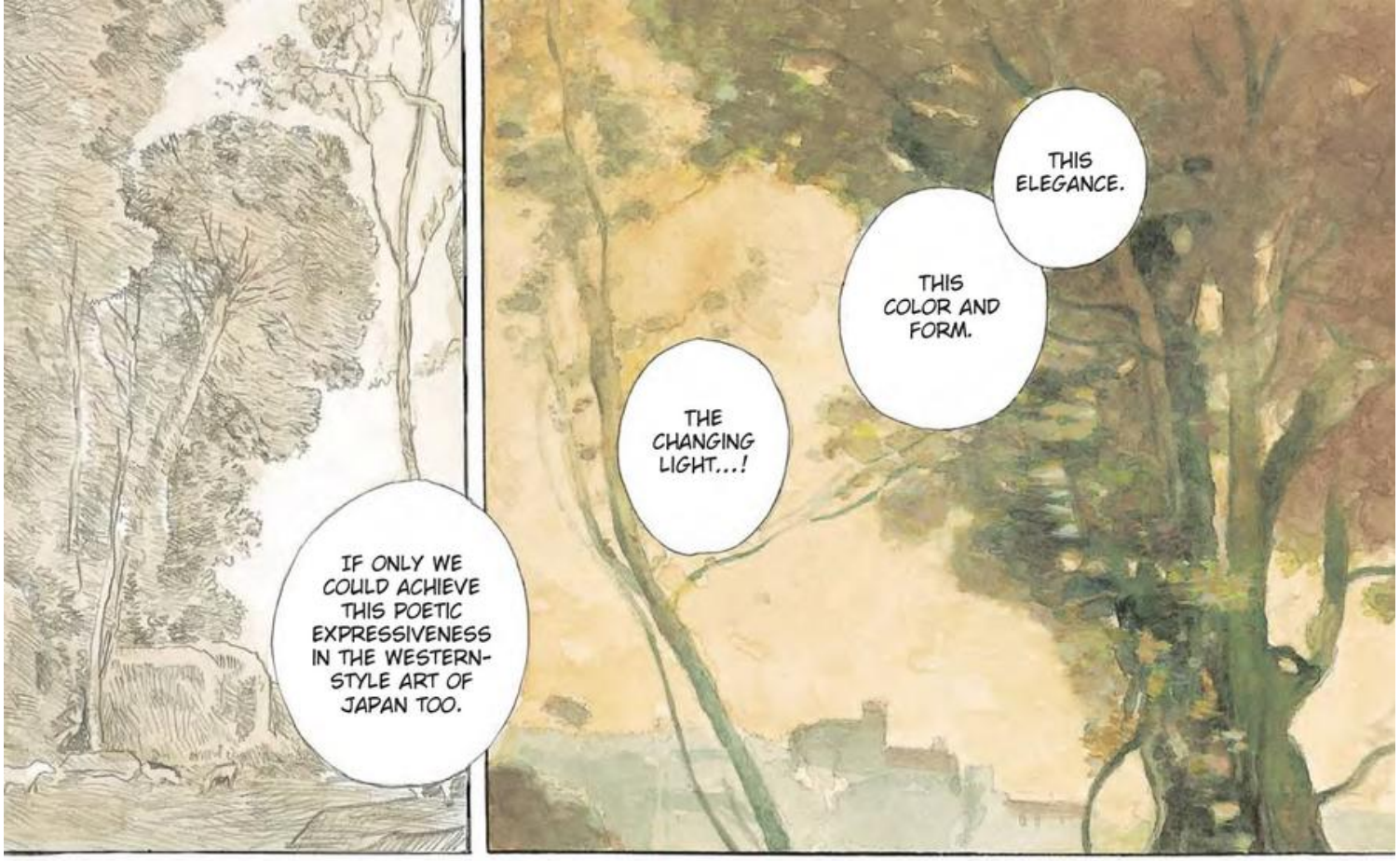
CHU ASAI.

EXCUSE ME, BUT...
... YOU ARE...?
OH!.
THE NAME IS ASAI.


THAT IS WHAT...
... EDGAR DEGAS SAID OF HIM.


SINCE COMING HERE...
... I HAVE TRAVELED AROUND PARIS AND ITS ENVIRONS WORKING ON MY DRAWINGS.
OH...
...
I TIMED MY STUDIES HERE WITH THE PARIS EXPO.
"LEARN FROM NATURE WHOLLY AS YOUR MASTER."
...
I AM THINKING TO VISIT FONTAINEBLEAU OUTSIDE OF PARIS TOMORROW MORNING.
THESE WERE FONTANESI-SENSEI'S PARTING WORDS.

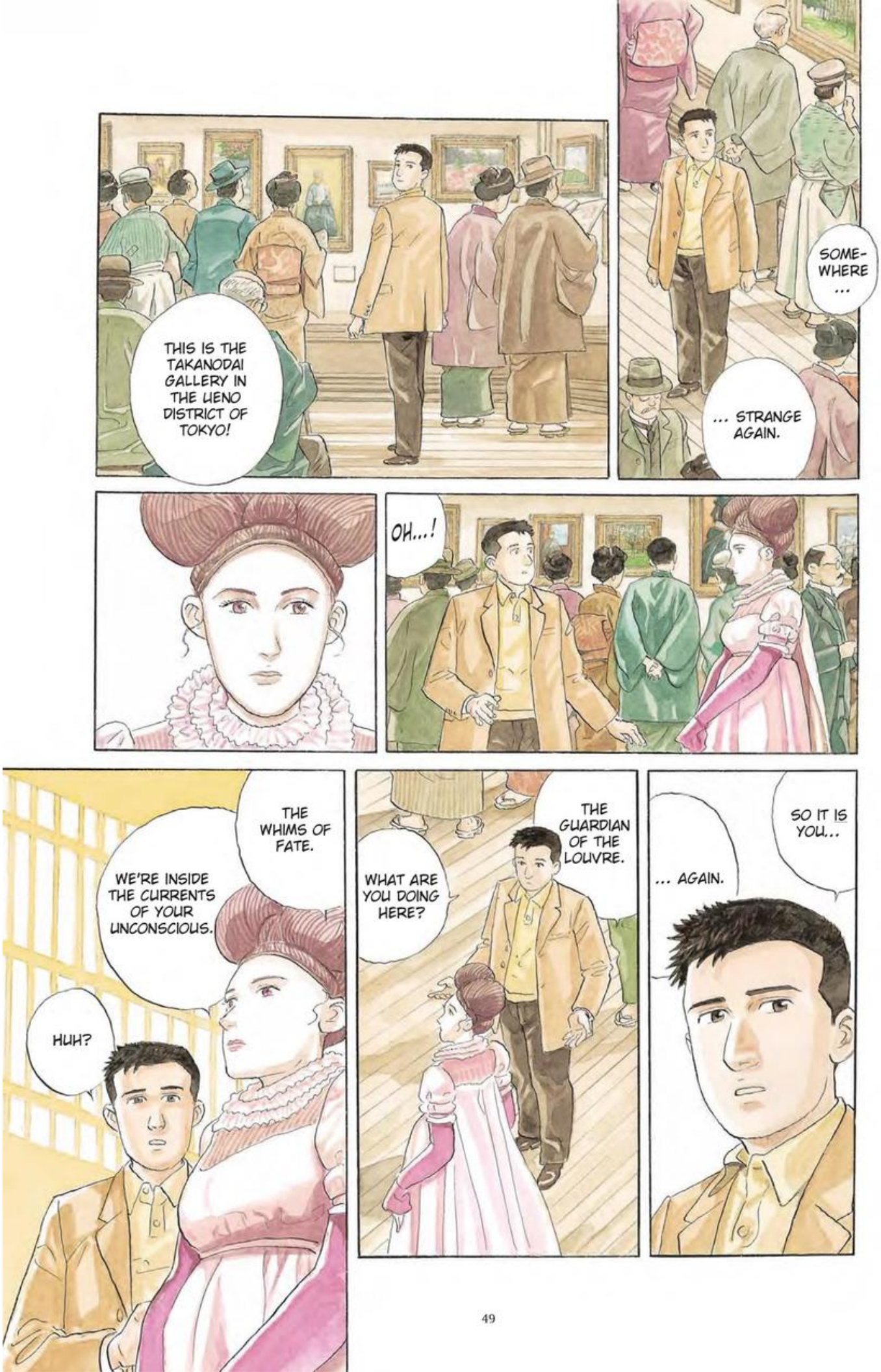
WHSS WHSS
LOOK AT THIS LANDSCAPE,...
... SO RELAXED AND BRIMMING WITH POETIC EMOTION.
RSS RSS


IF ONLY WE COULD ACHIEVE THIS POETIC EXPRESSIVENESS IN THE WESTERN-STYLE ART OF JAPAN TOO.
THE CHANGING LIGHT...!
THIS COLOR AND FORM.
THIS ELEGANCE.

RSS

RSS
RSS
OH...!

TAISHOKWAN
NOW THEN.
ONE MUST NOT LOOK AT AN ASAI WATERCOLOR AS YOU WOULD AN ORDINARY WATERCOLOR.
DO NOT THINK OF IT AS LOOKING AT SOMETHING REAL.
TRY TO LOOK AT ASAI'S REFINEMENT.


THIS IS THE TAKANODAI GALLERY IN THE UENO DISTRICT OF TOKYO!
SOME-WHERE ...
... STRANGE AGAIN.
OH...!
THE WHIMS OF FATE.
WE'RE INSIDE THE CURRENTS OF YOUR UNCONSCIOUS.
HUH?
THE GUARDIAN OF THE LOUVRE.
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
SO IT IS YOU...
... AGAIN.

IT'S CERTAINLY BOOMING, ISN'T IT?

THIS THE SIXTH PACIFIC ART SOCIETY EXHIBITION.
IT INCLUDES A SPECIAL POSTHUMOUS DISPLAY OF CHU ASAI'S WESTERN-STYLE PAINTINGS.

THAT IS THE WRITER SOSEKI NATSUME.
HE IS SPEAKING TO THOSE STUDENTS.

IT HAS A REMARKABLE QUIETUDE DRIFTING THROUGH IT.
ALL OF THE AQUARELLE TONES ARE PALE.

COULD I PERHAPS DESCRIBE IT AS SUBLIME?

IT'S MARVE-LOUS.
IT LOOKS AS IF IT WAS COMPLETED IN ALMOST ONE SITTING.
THE COLORS USED ARE FEW IN NUMBER.
THE BRUSHWORK IS ASSURED.
WE CAN SEE FROM THIS ASAI'S ACUTE SENSITIVITY TO NATURE.
DELICATELY ...
...HOLDING HIS BREATH, CAPTURING THE SUBTLETIES.
RSS
RSS
RSS

AH!
SO YOU'RE HERE TOO, ARE YOU?
...

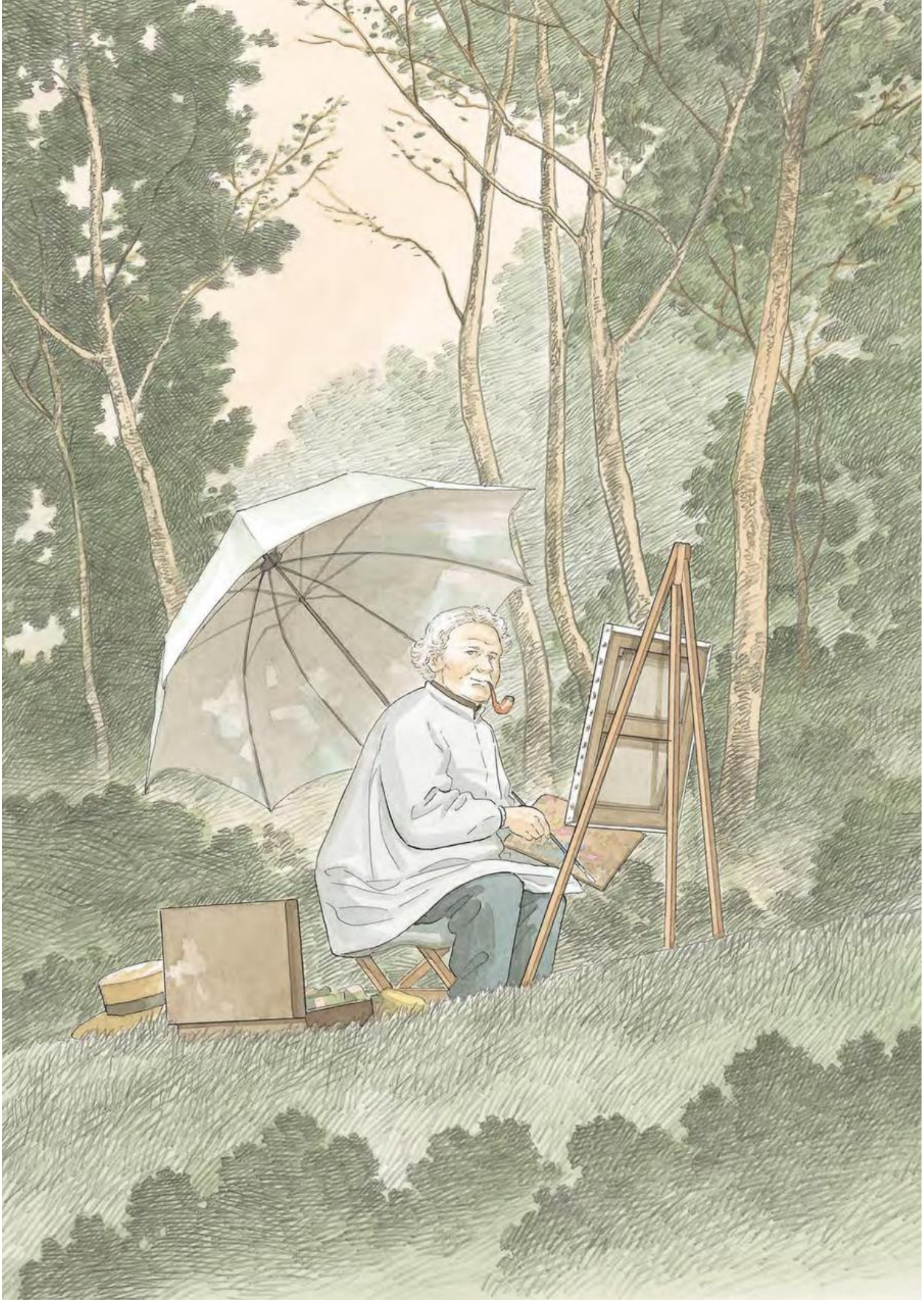
... BY COROT.
WE'RE IN A DRAWING OF A FOREST...
HAHAHA!
ASTO-NISHING, IS IT NOT?
... THIS PLACE?
WHAT IS...
"FIRST COMES DRAWING.
SECOND COMES DRAWING.
A DRAWING IS LINES BEARING ONE'S HEART.
IT IS FORM.
IT IS THE BRIGHT AND DARK. IN OTHER WORDS: LIGHT ITSELF."

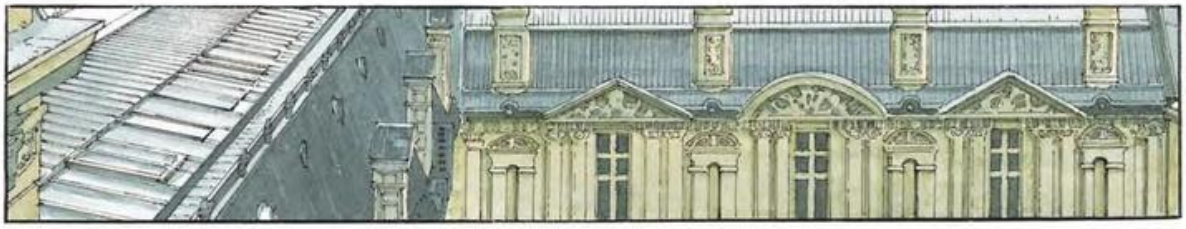
DRAWING IS CRUCIAL WORK FOR THE PAINTER.
... THE ORDER OF BEAUTY THAT IS WITHIN NATURE AND WHICH SURPASSES NATURE.
IT MUST CAPTURE...

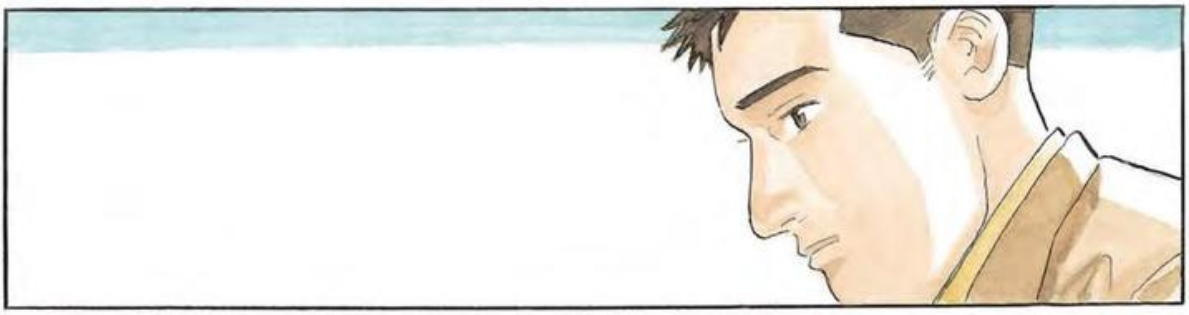
RSS
RSS

WITHOUT DRAWING...
... A PAINTING CANNOT BE REALIZED.

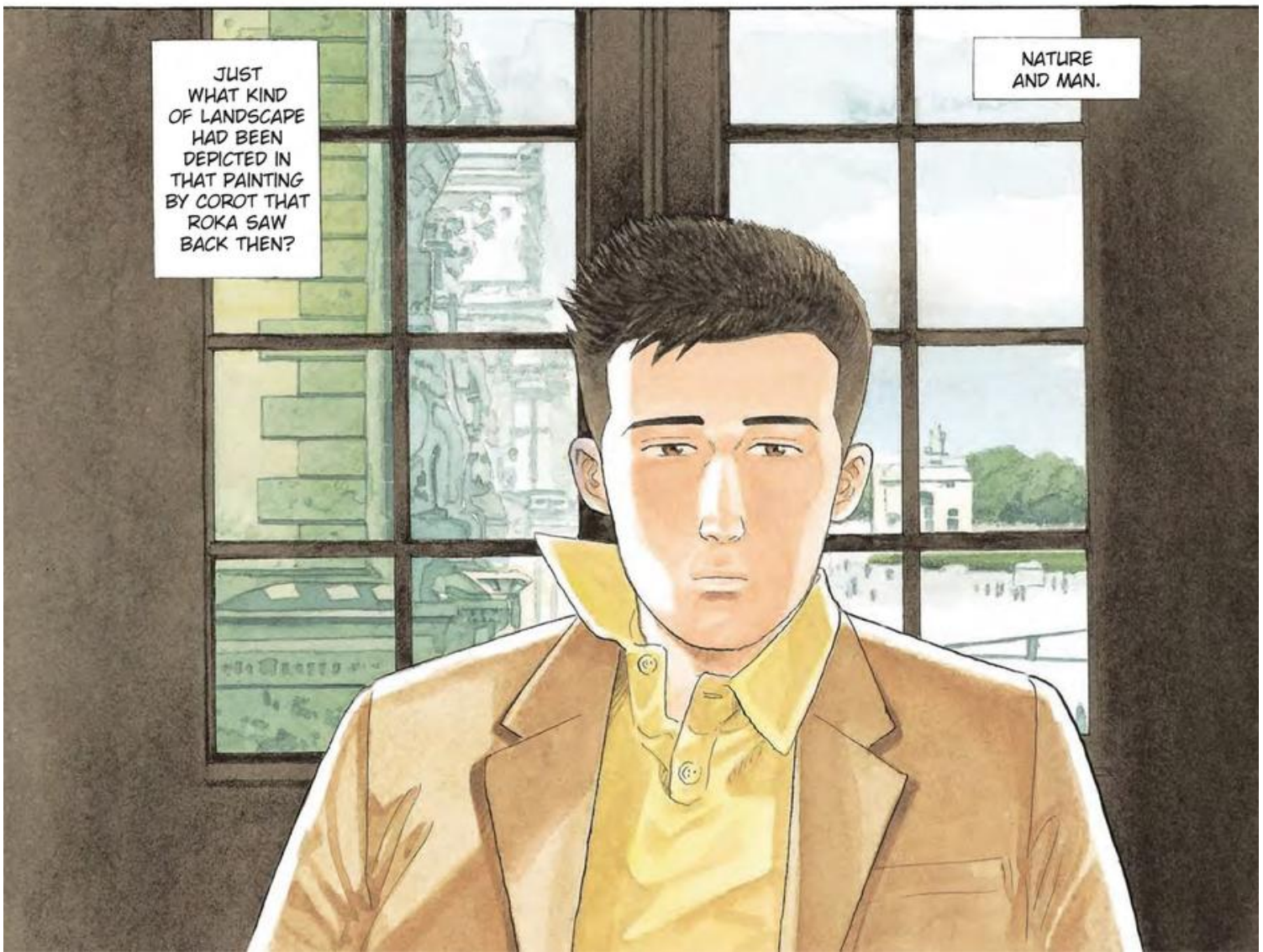
OH...!
RSS
RSS
THAT MAN...!
COULD THAT BE...?
IT IS.
CAMILLE COROT HIMSELF.

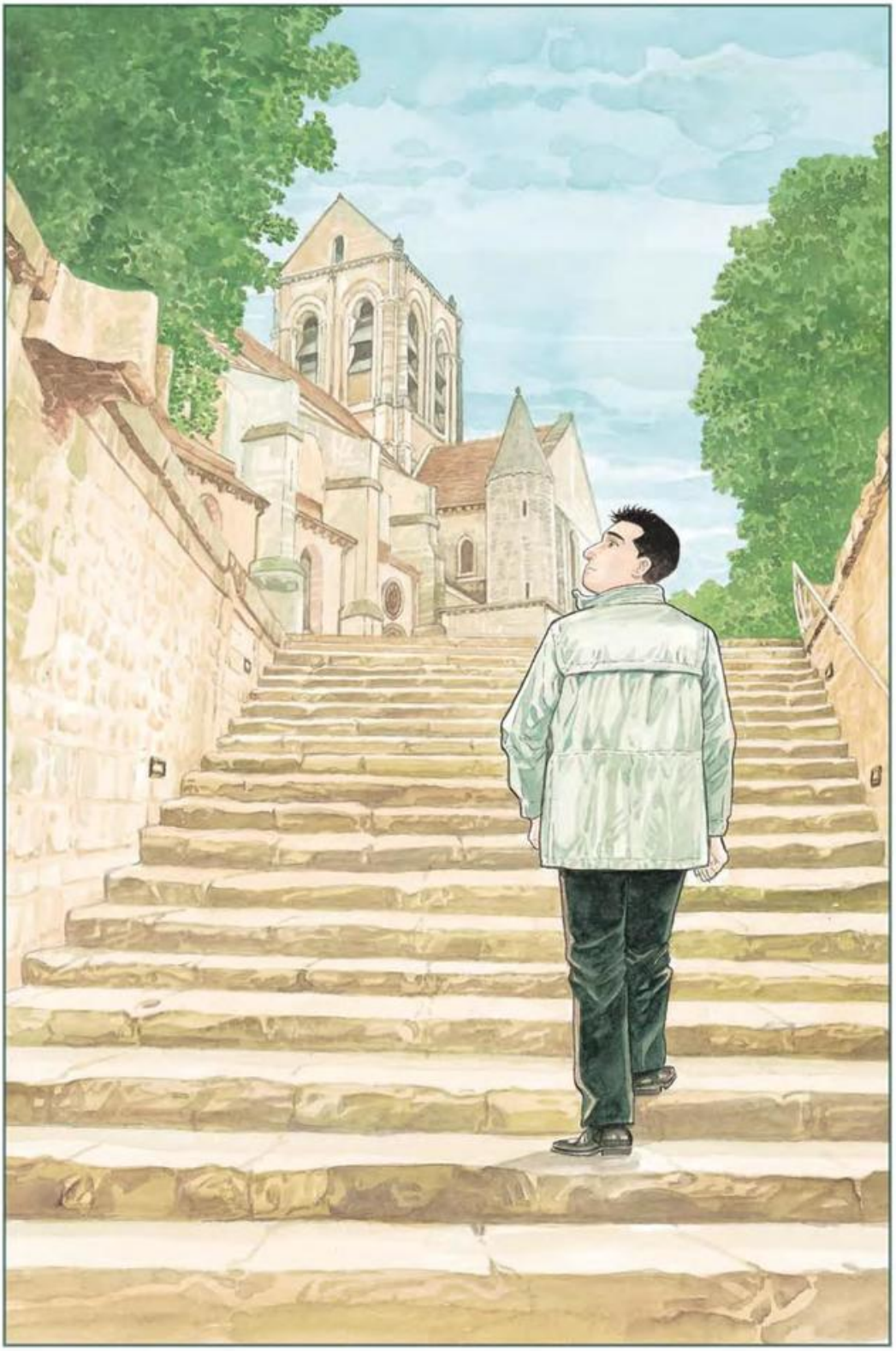






MONSIEUR.
IT IS CLOSING TIME.
OH.
SURE.


JUST WHAT KIND OF LANDSCAPE HAD BEEN DEPICTED IN THAT PAINTING BY COROT THAT ROKA SAW BACK THEN?
NATURE AND MAN.



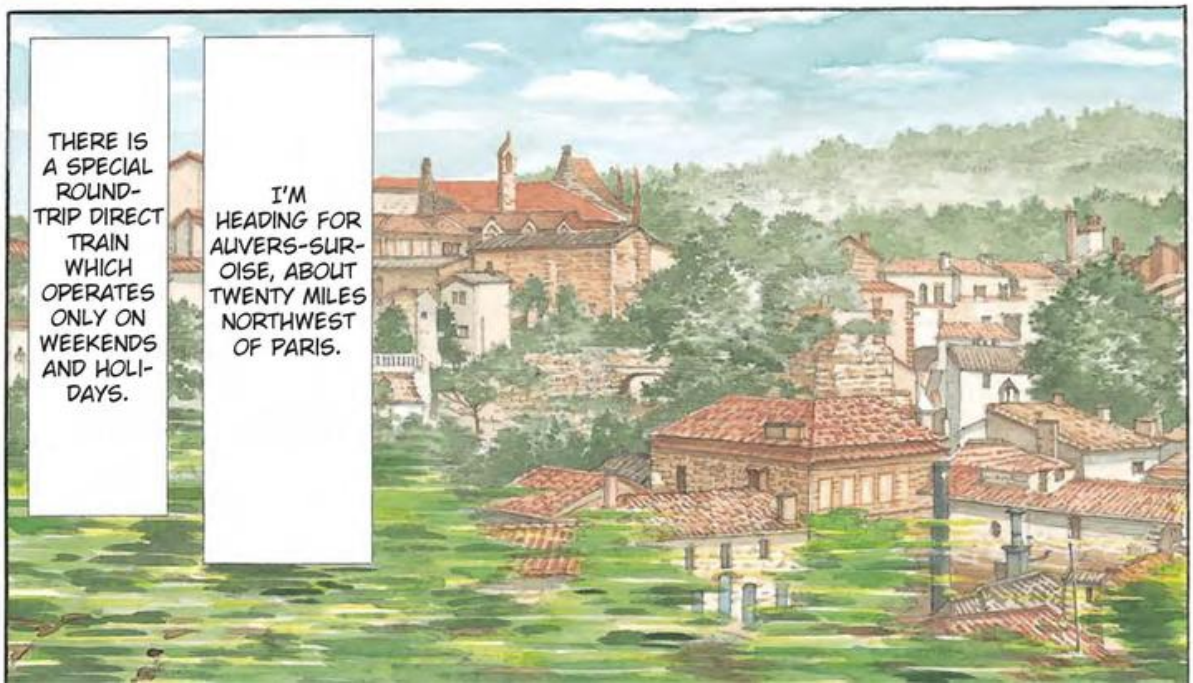
CHAPTER 3

DAUBIGNY'S GARDEN

SUNDAY.

WHOOOSH

TODAY, I'M TRAVELING OUTSIDE OF PARIS.

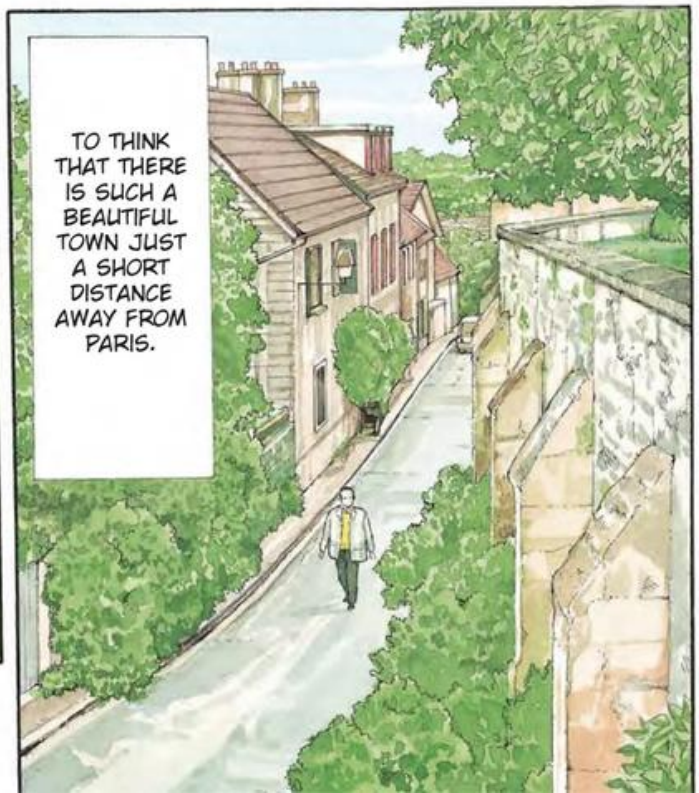

THERE IS A SPECIAL ROUND-TRIP DIRECT TRAIN WHICH OPERATES ONLY ON WEEKENDS AND HOLI-DAYS.
I'M HEADING FOR AUVERS-SUR-OISE, ABOUT TWENTY MILES NORTHWEST OF PARIS.

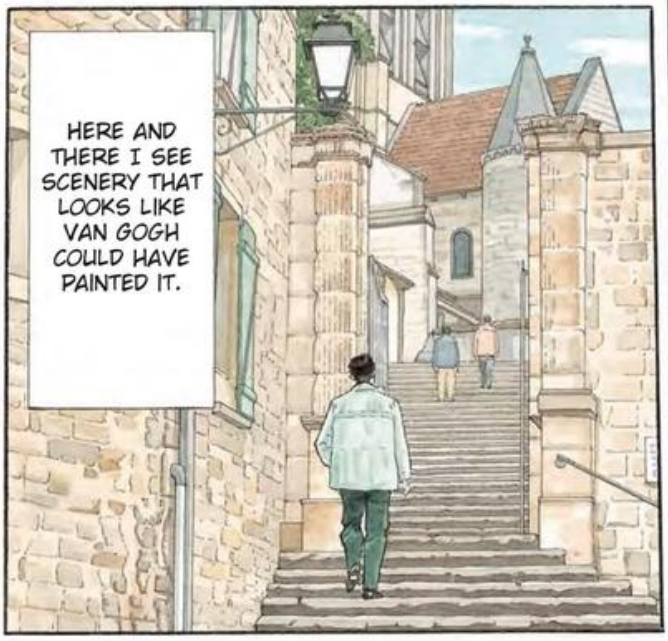
BEING THE FINAL RESTING PLACE OF VAN GOGH, AUVERS IS A WELL-KNOWN SIGHT-SEEING DESTINATION EVEN AMONG JAPANESE.

AHH...!
TRUE TO ITS REPUTATION!

SO INVIGORATING.
IT FEELS LOVELY.
MENATA

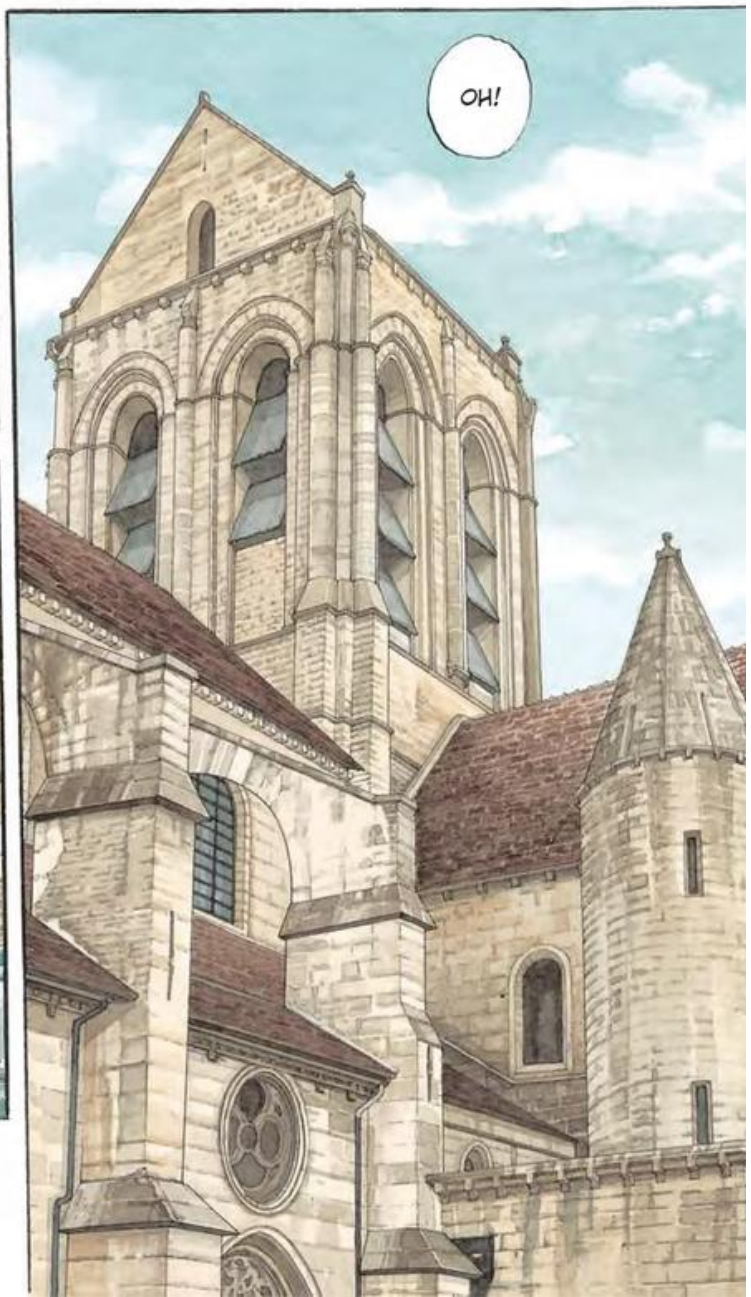
AHH.
I'M SO GLAD I CAME HERE.

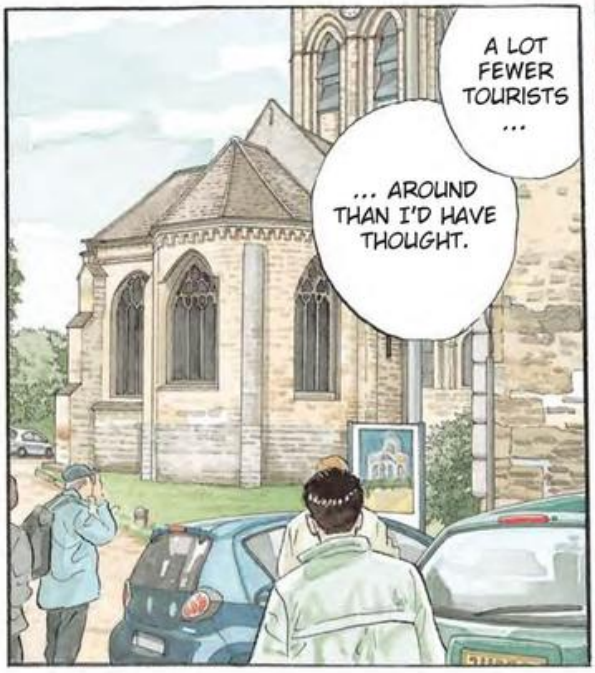

TO THINK THAT THERE IS SUCH A BEAUTIFUL TOWN JUST A SHORT DISTANCE AWAY FROM PARIS.

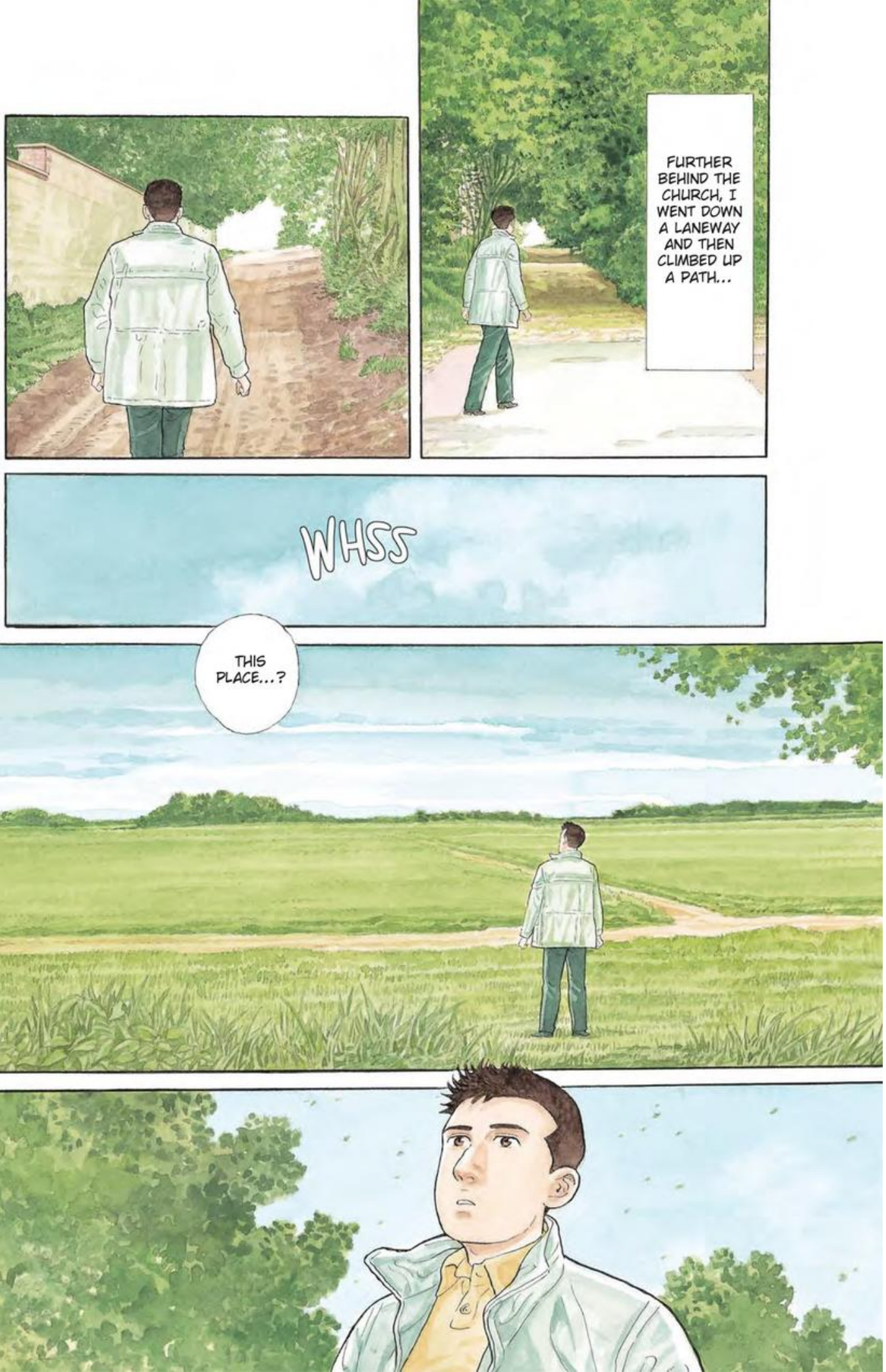

HERE AND THERE I SEE SCENERY THAT LOOKS LIKE VAN GOGH COULD HAVE PAINTED IT.

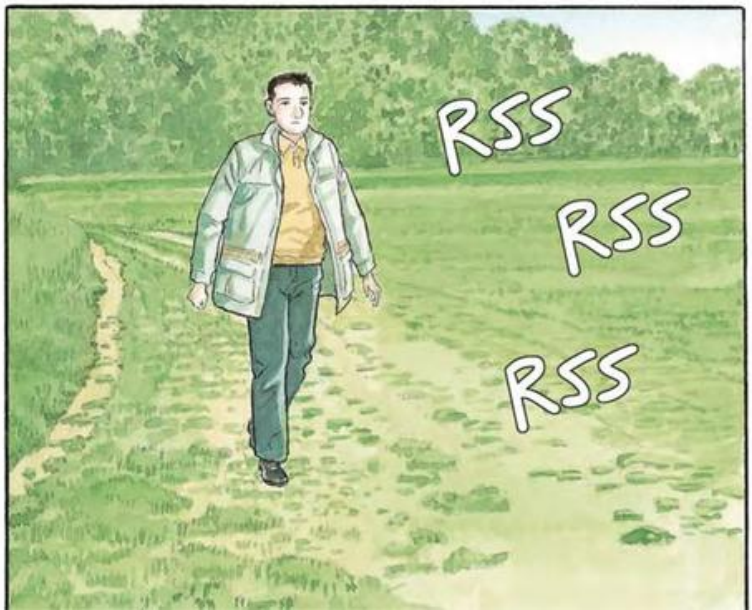
A FRIEND WHO KNOWS FRANCE WELL TOLD ME I OUGHT TO VISIT HERE IF I HAD THE TIME.

THIS IS...
... THE CHURCH OF AUVERS.

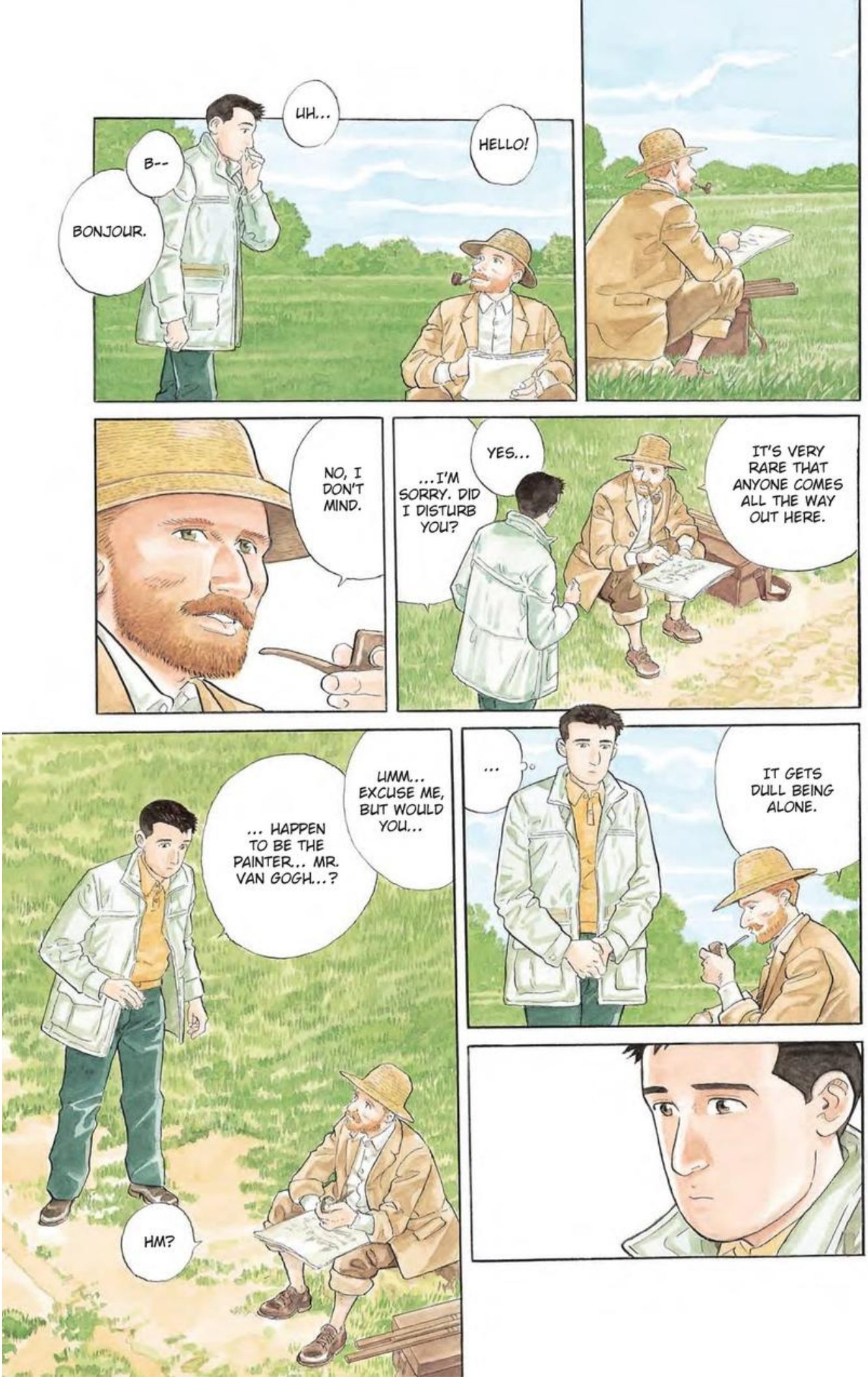

OH!

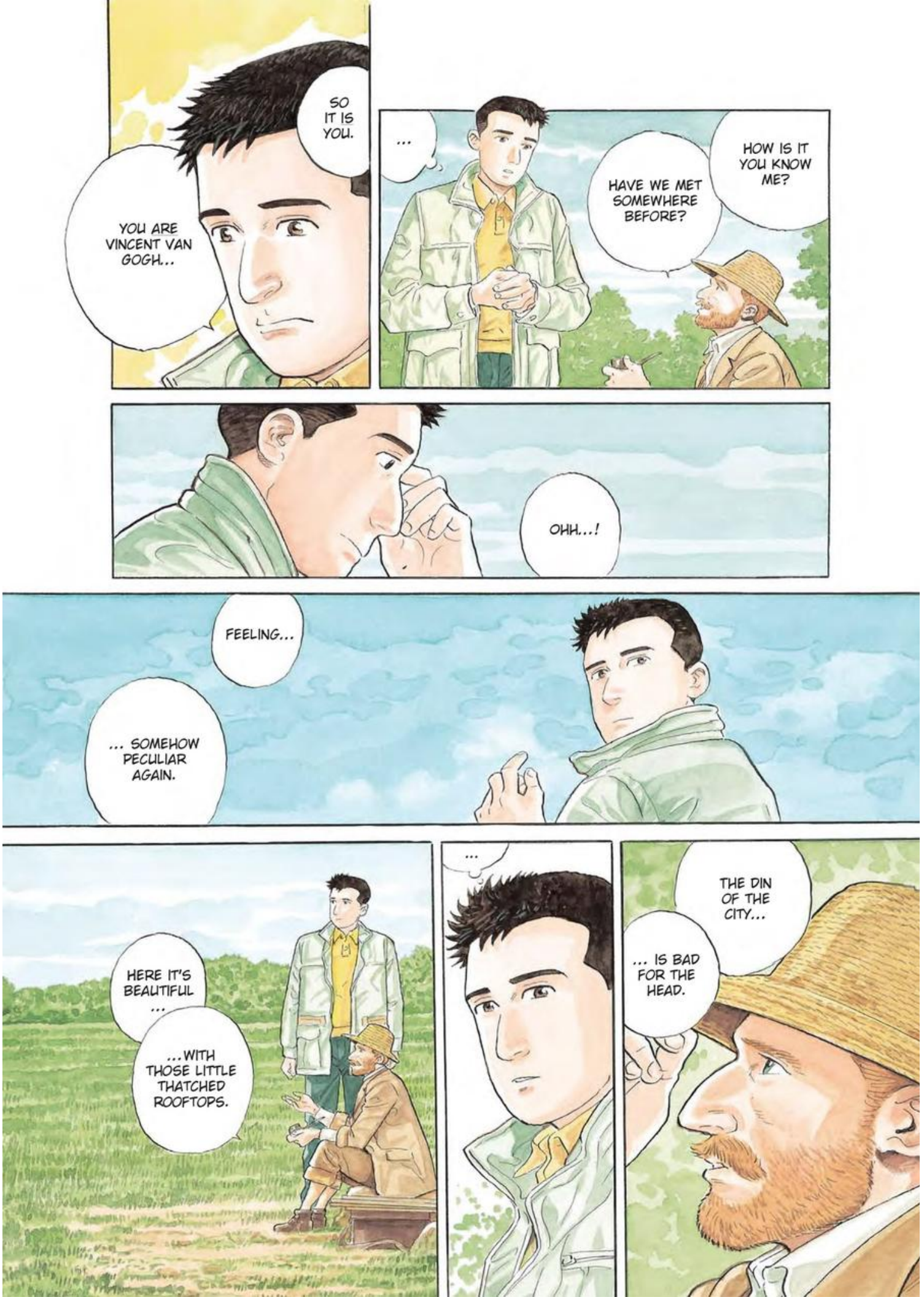

A LOT FEWER TOURISTS ...
... AROUND THAN I'D HAVE THOUGHT.

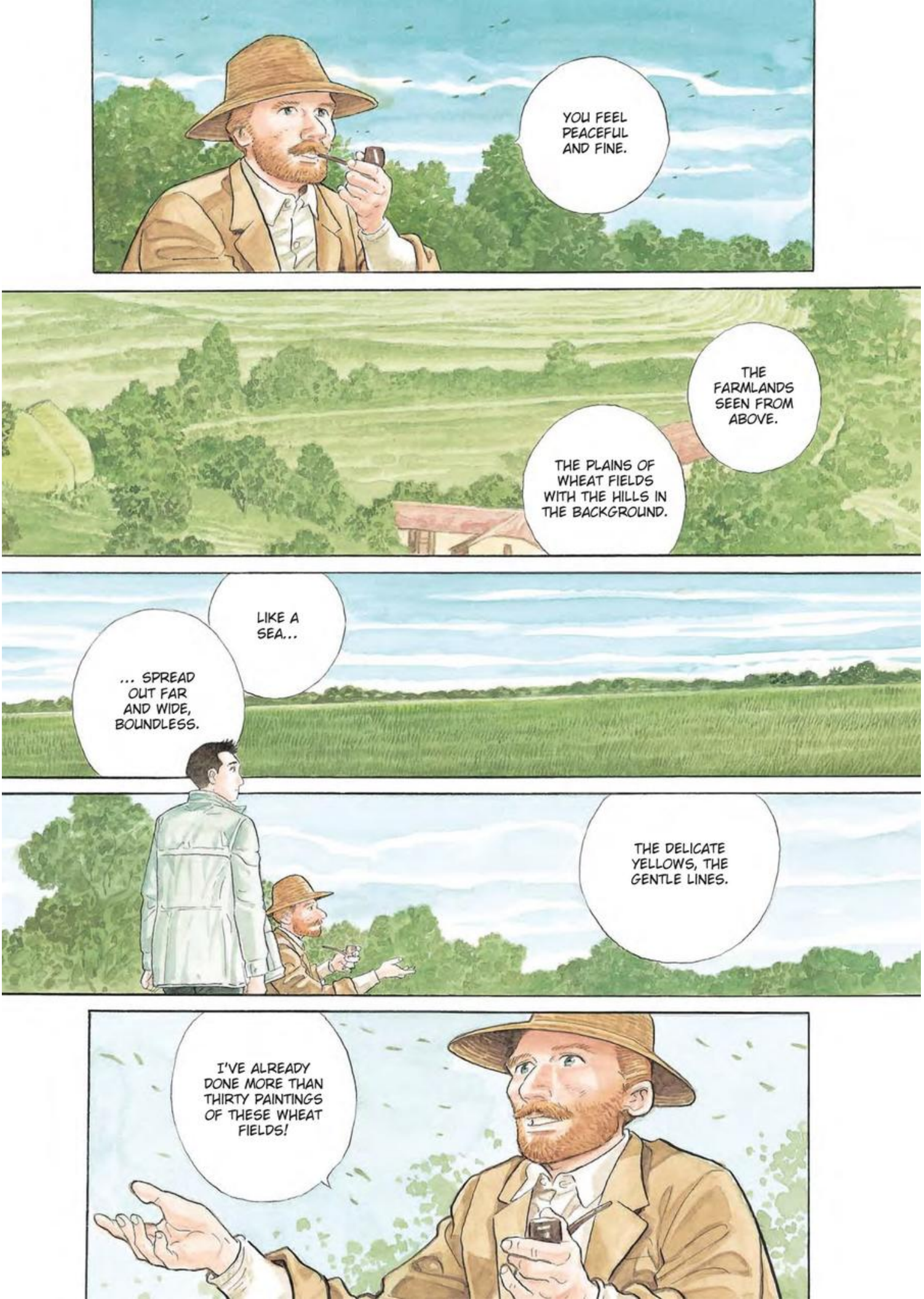

FURTHER BEHIND THE CHURCH, I WENT DOWN A LANEWAY AND THEN CLIMBED UP A PATH...
WHSS
THIS PLACE...?

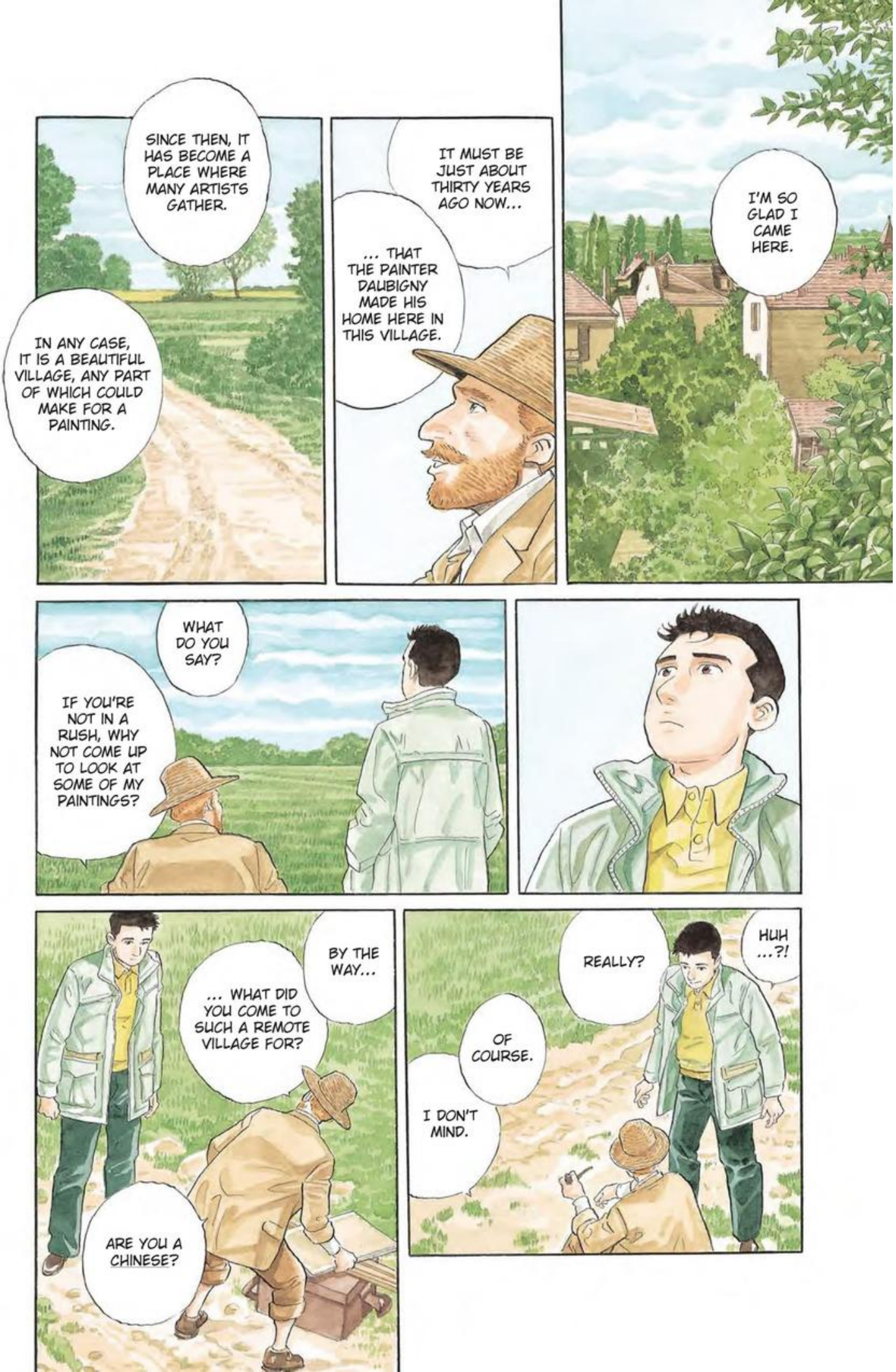

RSS
RSS
RSS

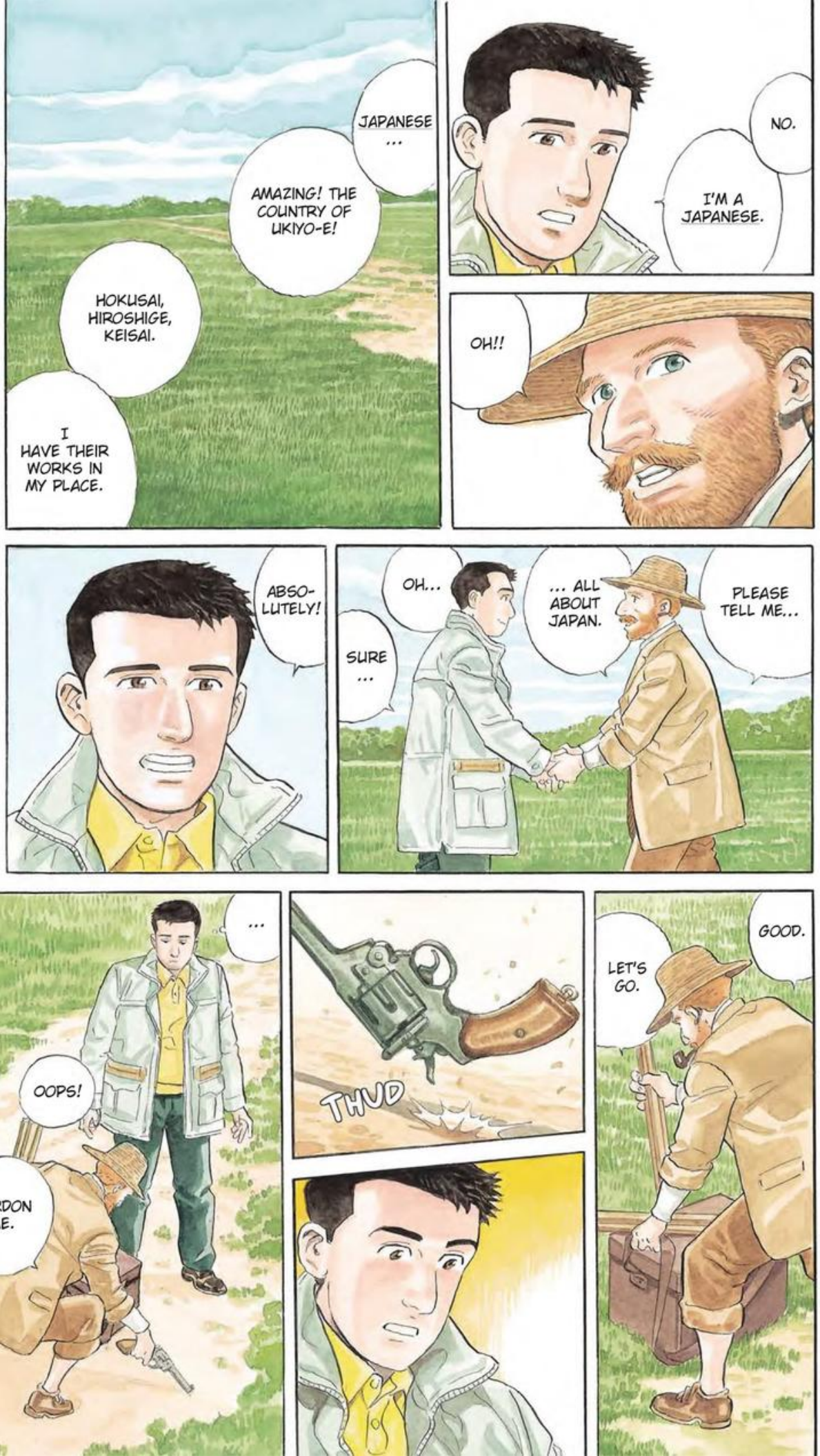
OH!

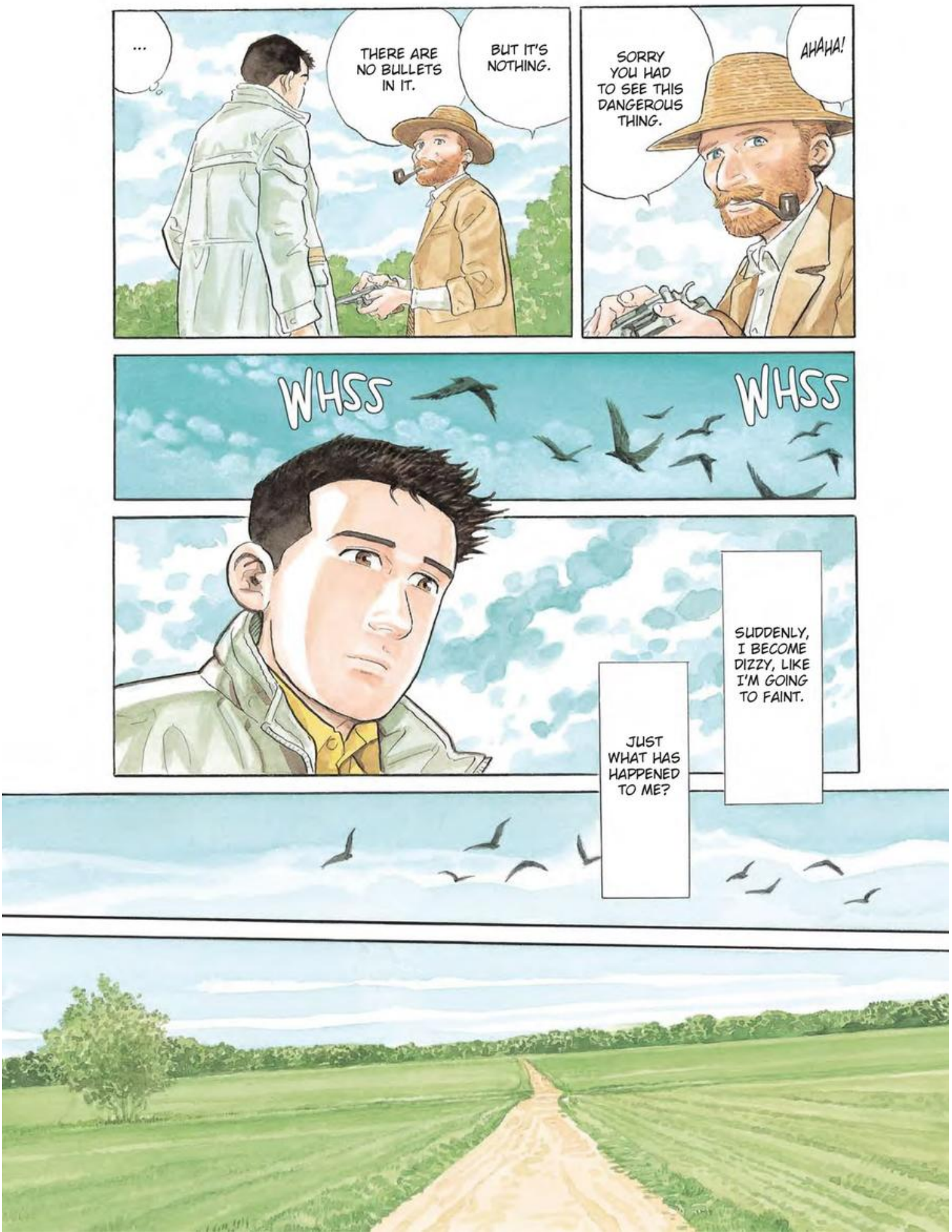

UH...
HELLO!
B--
BONJOUR.
NO, I DON'T MIND.
YES...
...I'M SORRY. DID I DISTURB YOU?
IT'S VERY RARE THAT ANYONE COMES ALL THE WAY OUT HERE.
UMM... EXCUSE ME, BUT WOULD YOU...
... HAPPEN TO BE THE PAINTER... MR. VAN GOGH...?
HM?
...
IT GETS DULL BEING ALONE.

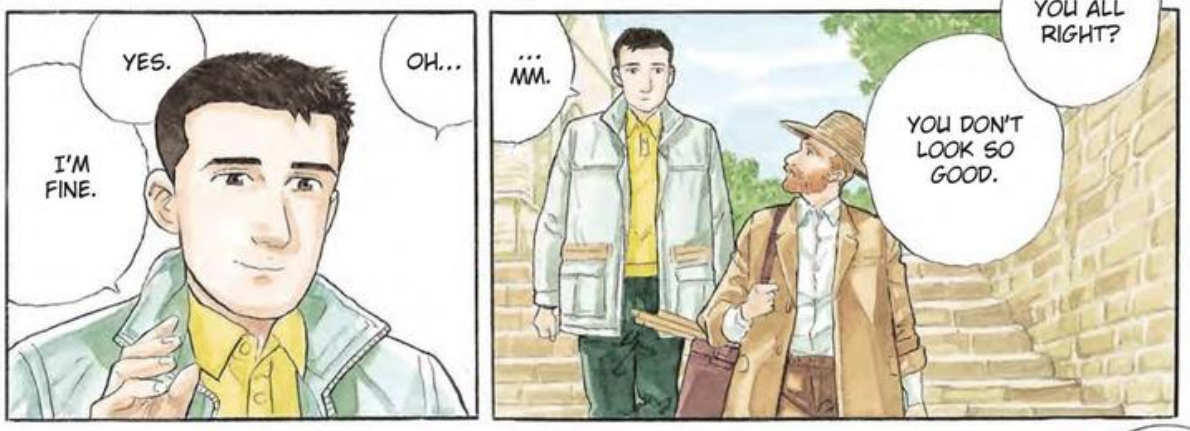

SO IT IS YOU.
YOU ARE VINCENT VAN GOGH...
...
HOW IS IT YOU KNOW ME?
HAVE WE MET SOMEWHERE BEFORE?
OHH...!
FEELING...
... SOMEHOW PECULIAR AGAIN.
HERE IT'S BEAUTIFUL ...
...WITH THOSE LITTLE THATCHED ROOFTOPS.
...
THE DIN OF THE CITY...
... IS BAD FOR THE HEAD.


YOU FEEL PEACEFUL AND FINE.
THE FARMLANDS SEEN FROM ABOVE.
THE PLAINS OF WHEAT FIELDS WITH THE HILLS IN THE BACKGROUND.
LIKE A SEA...
... SPREAD OUT FAR AND WIDE, BOUNDLESS.
THE DELICATE YELLOWS, THE GENTLE LINES.
I'VE ALREADY DONE MORE THAN THIRTY PAINTINGS OF THESE WHEAT FIELDS!

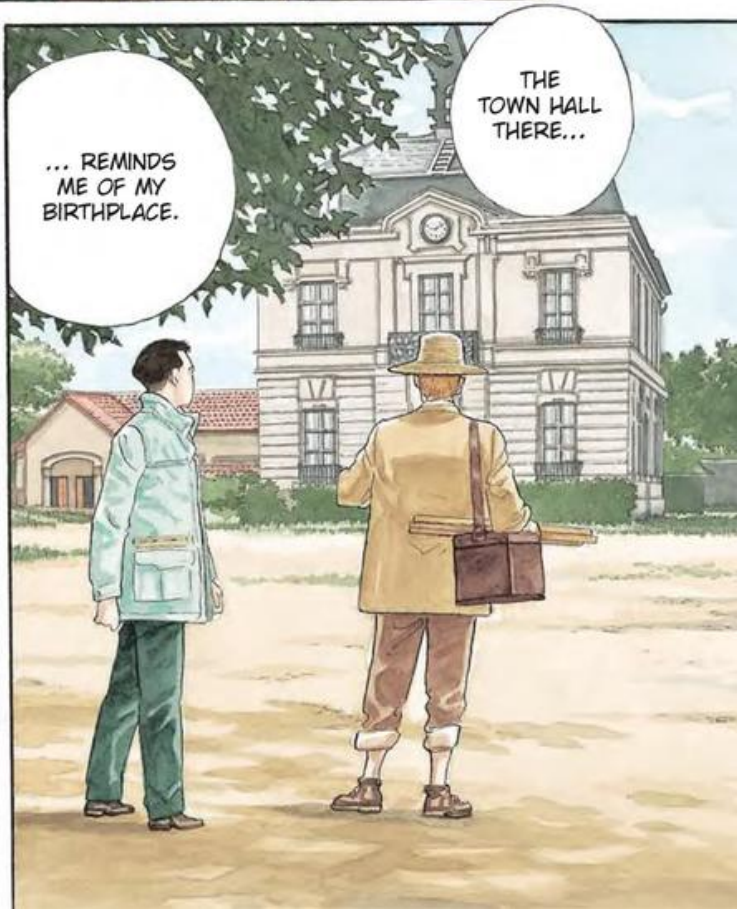

SINCE THEN, IT HAS BECOME A PLACE WHERE MANY ARTISTS GATHER.
IN ANY CASE, IT IS A BEAUTIFUL VILLAGE, ANY PART OF WHICH COULD MAKE FOR A PAINTING.
IT MUST BE JUST ABOUT THIRTY YEARS AGO NOW...
... THAT THE PAINTER DAUBIGNY MADE HIS HOME HERE IN THIS VILLAGE.
I'M SO GLAD I CAME HERE.
WHAT DO YOU SAY?
IF YOU'RE NOT IN A RUSH, WHY NOT COME UP TO LOOK AT SOME OF MY PAINTINGS?
BY THE WAY...
... WHAT DID YOU COME TO SUCH A REMOTE VILLAGE FOR?
ARE YOU A CHINESE?
REALLY?
HUH ...?!
OF COURSE.
I DON'T MIND.


JAPANESE ...
AMAZING! THE COUNTRY OF UKIYO-E!
HOKUSAI, HIROSHIGE, KEISAI.
I HAVE THEIR WORKS IN MY PLACE.
NO.
I'M A JAPANESE.
OH!!
ABSO-LUTELY!
OH...
SURE ...
... ALL ABOUT JAPAN.
PLEASE TELL ME...
...
OOPS!
PARDON ME.
THUD
GOOD.
LET'S GO.

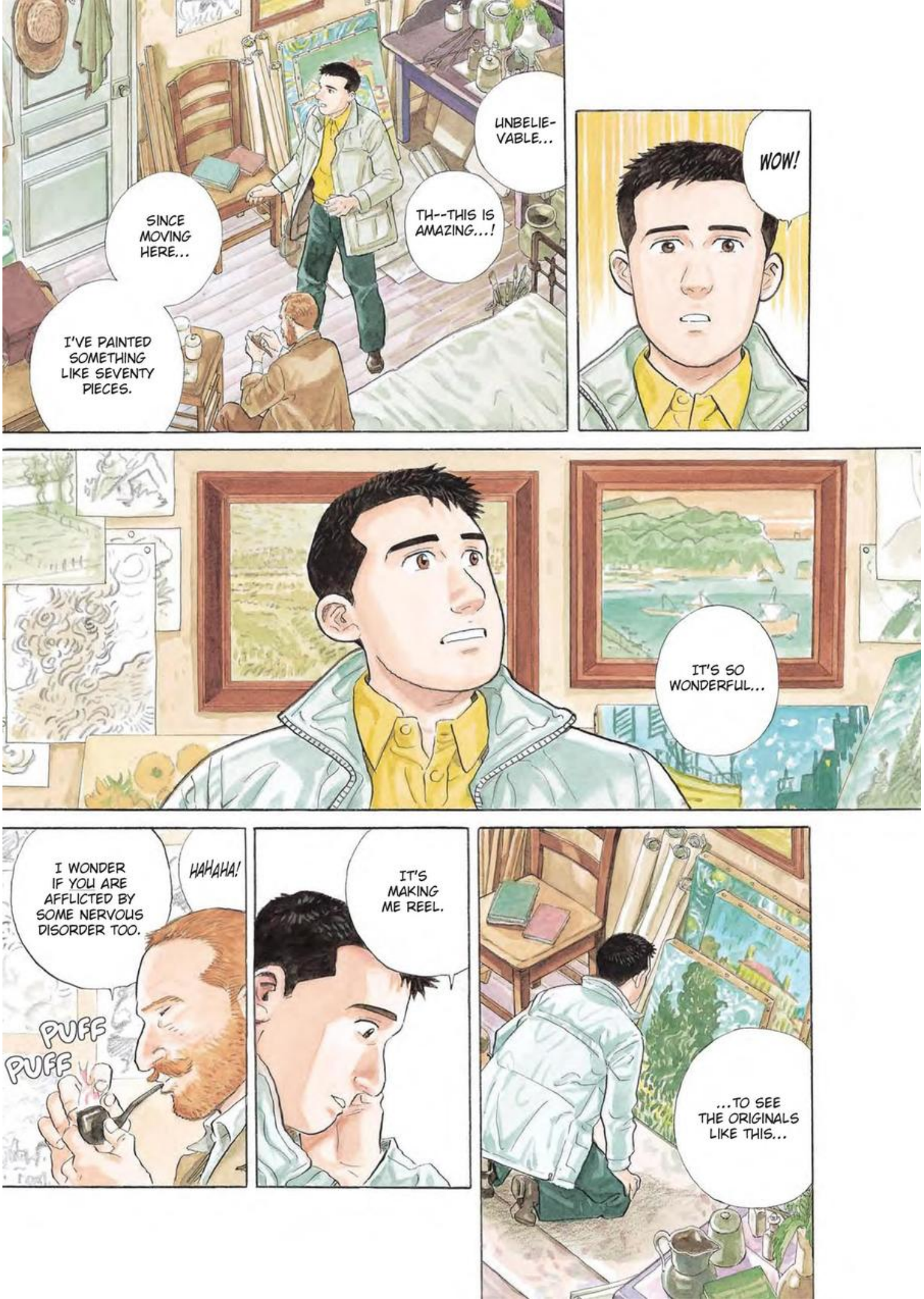

...
THERE ARE NO BULLETS IN IT.
BUT IT'S NOTHING.
SORRY YOU HAD TO SEE THIS DANGEROUS THING.
AHAHA!
WHSS
WHSS
SUDDENLY, I BECOME DIZZY, LIKE I'M GOING TO FAINT.
JUST WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO ME?

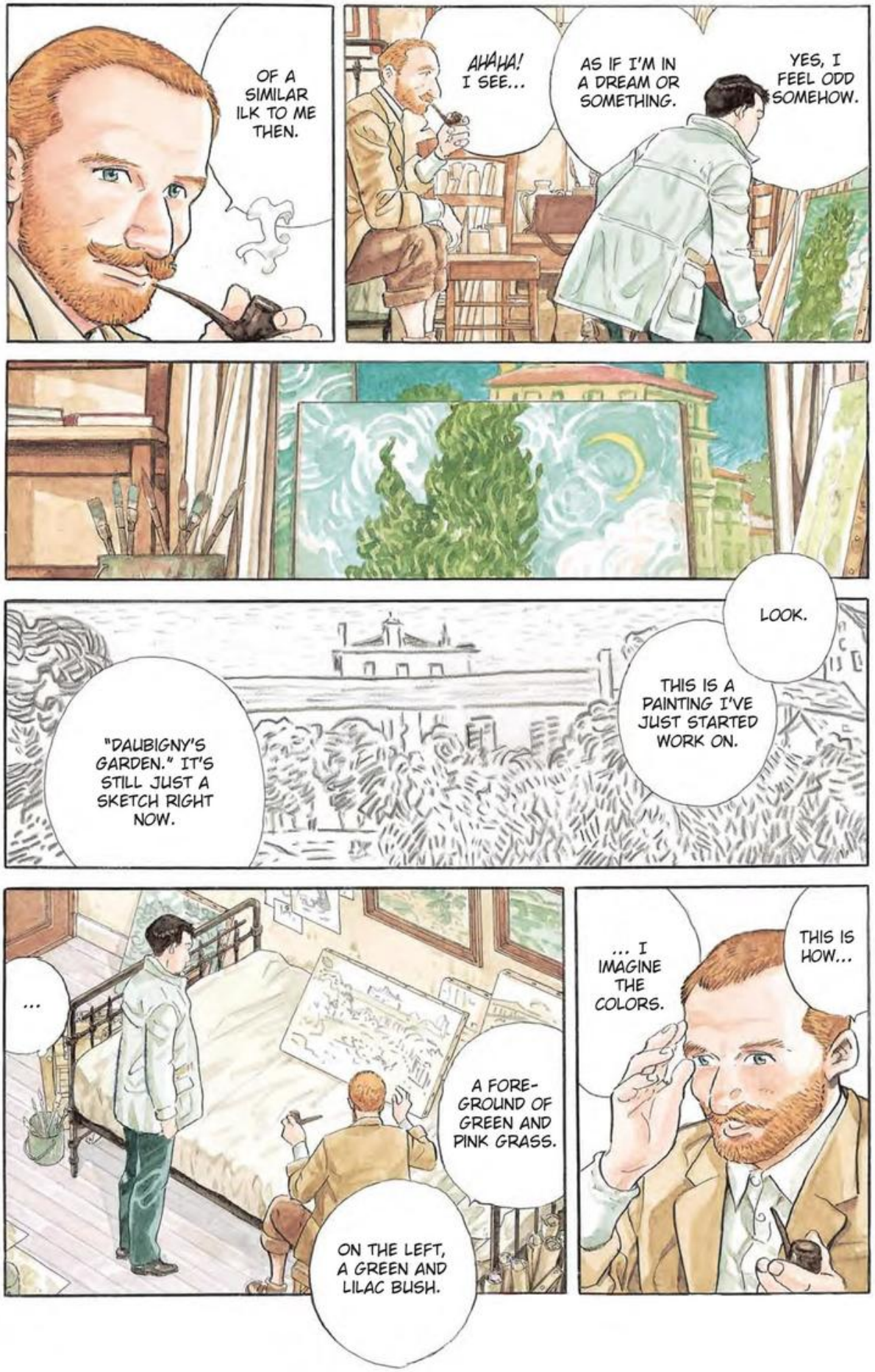

YES.
I'M FINE.
OH...
... MM.
YOU DON'T LOOK SO GOOD.
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

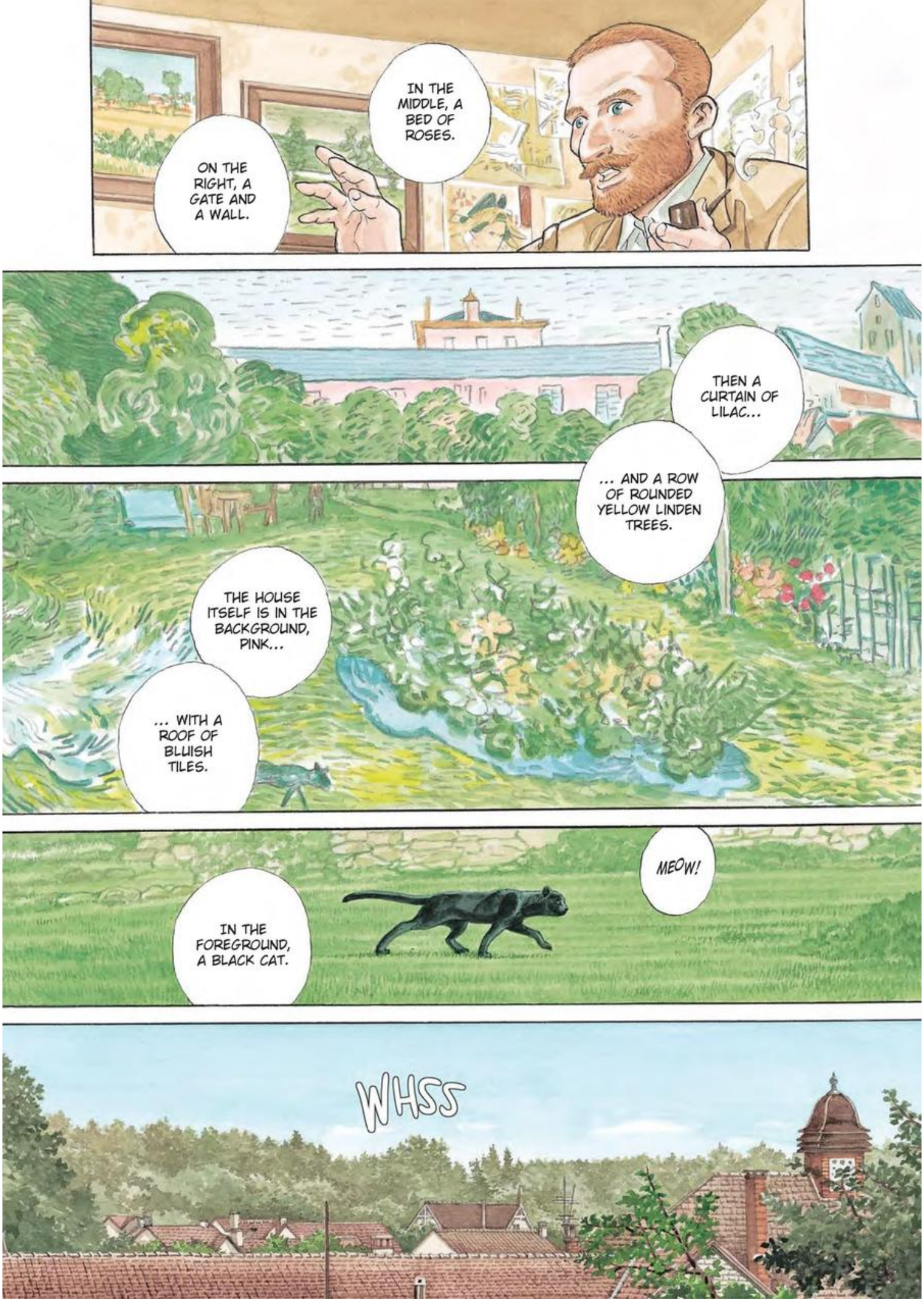
LOOK, HERE WE ARE.
THE FLOOR ABOVE THIS RESTAURANT.
MARTINI
MARTINI


... REMINDS ME OF MY BIRTHPLACE.
THE TOWN HALL THERE...

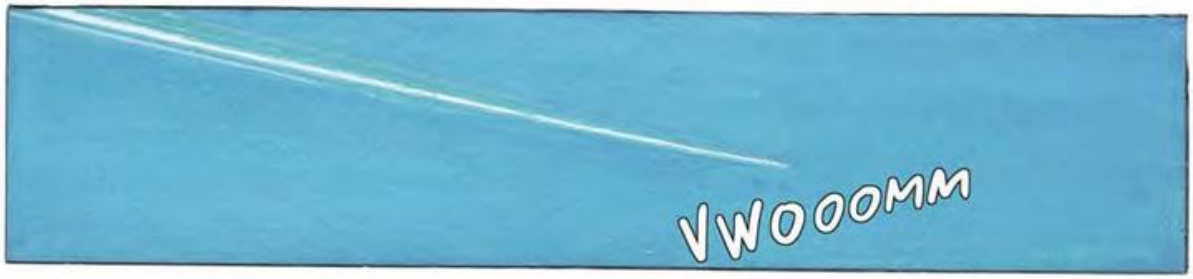
KCHAK
CREAK
THERE ARE OTHER DUTCH PAINTERS...
CREAK
... WHO LIVE IN THE ROOMS BESIDE ME.
CREAK
COME IN.
PLEASE.
IT'S CRAMPED...
... BUT THE RENT IS LOW.


SINCE MOVING HERE...
I'VE PAINTED SOMETHING LIKE SEVENTY PIECES.
TH--THIS IS AMAZING...!
UNBELIE-VABLE...
WOW!
IT'S SO WONDERFUL...
I WONDER IF YOU ARE AFFLICTED BY SOME NERVOUS DISORDER TOO.
HAHAHA!
PUFF
PUFF
IT'S MAKING ME REEL.
...TO SEE THE ORIGINALS LIKE THIS...


OF A SIMILAR ILK TO ME THEN.
AHAHA! I SEE...
AS IF I'M IN A DREAM OR SOMETHING.
YES, I FEEL ODD SOMEHOW.
LOOK.
THIS IS A PAINTING I'VE JUST STARTED WORK ON.
"DAUBIGNY'S GARDEN." IT'S STILL JUST A SKETCH RIGHT NOW.
...
A FORE-GROUND OF GREEN AND PINK GRASS.
ON THE LEFT, A GREEN AND LILAC BUSH.
... I IMAGINE THE COLORS.
THIS IS HOW...


ON THE RIGHT, A GATE AND A WALL.
IN THE MIDDLE, A BED OF ROSES.
THEN A CURTAIN OF LILAC...
... AND A ROW OF ROUNDED YELLOW LINDEN TREES.
THE HOUSE ITSELF IS IN THE BACKGROUND, PINK...
... WITH A ROOF OF BLUISH TILES.
IN THE FOREGROUND, A BLACK CAT.
MEOW!
WHSS

RSS
RSS
RSS


VWOOOMM

MEOW!

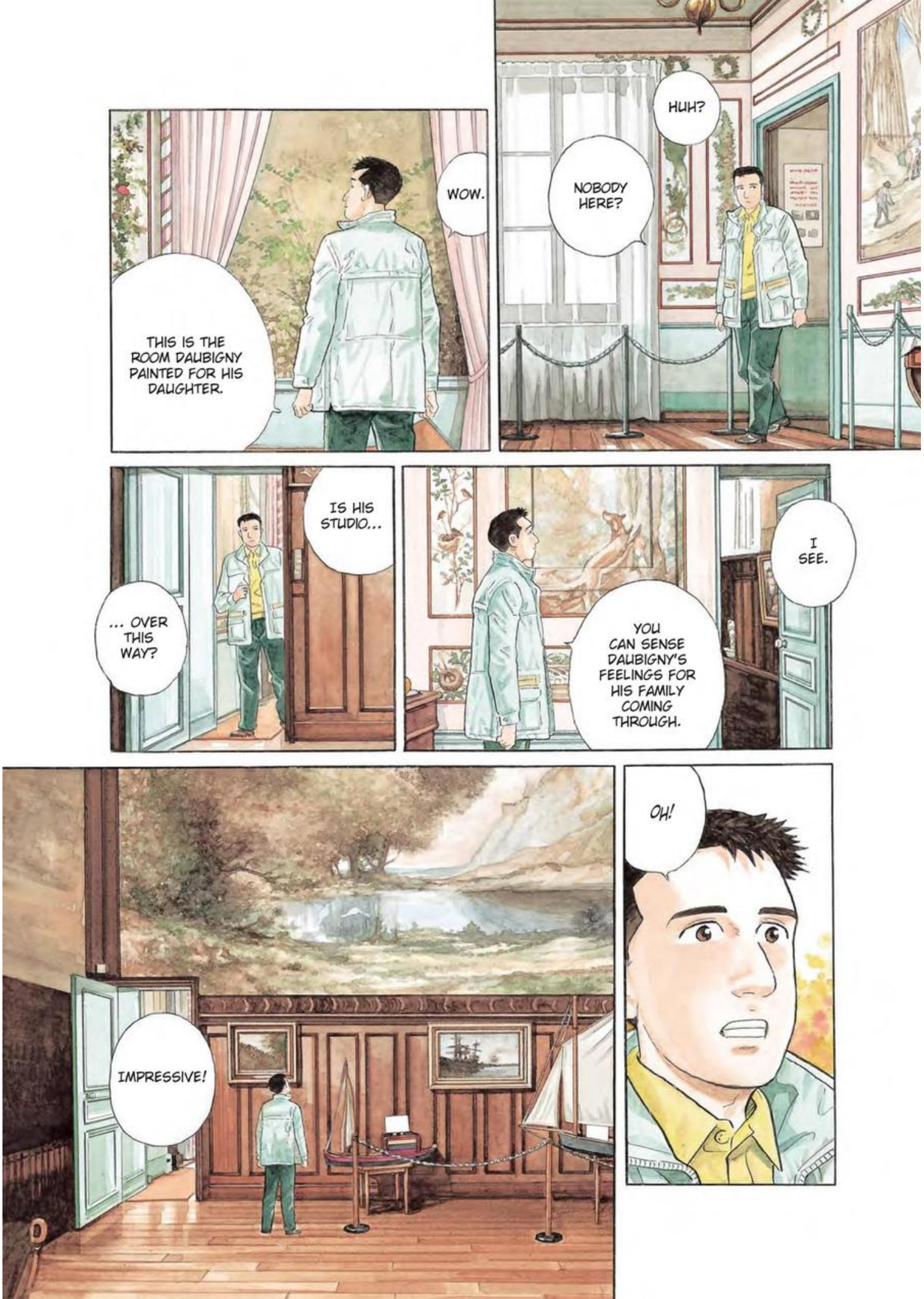
THIS IS...
... DAUBIGNY'S HOME STUDIO, ISN'T IT?

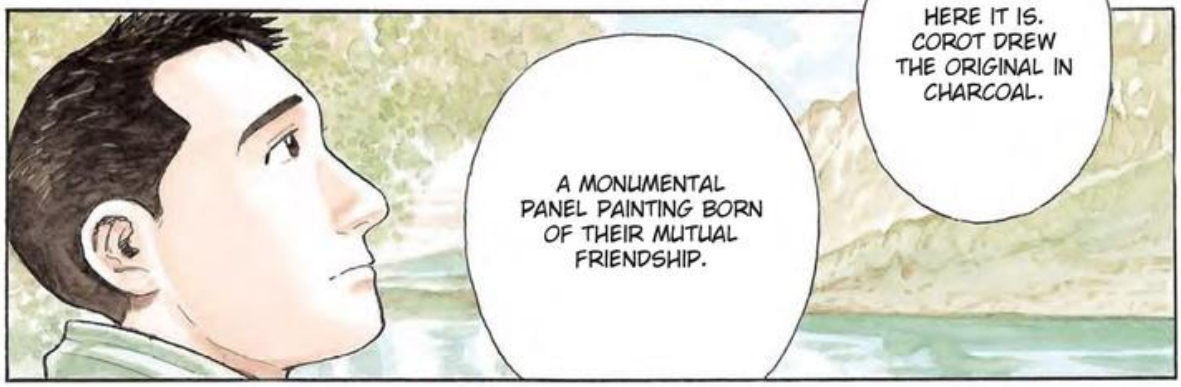
SO I'M BACK.

OR AT LEAST...
... TRY TO CONVINCE HIM NOT TO COMMIT SUICIDE.

RRM. TOO BAD.
I WANTED TO TALK ABOUT LOTS MORE WITH HIM.

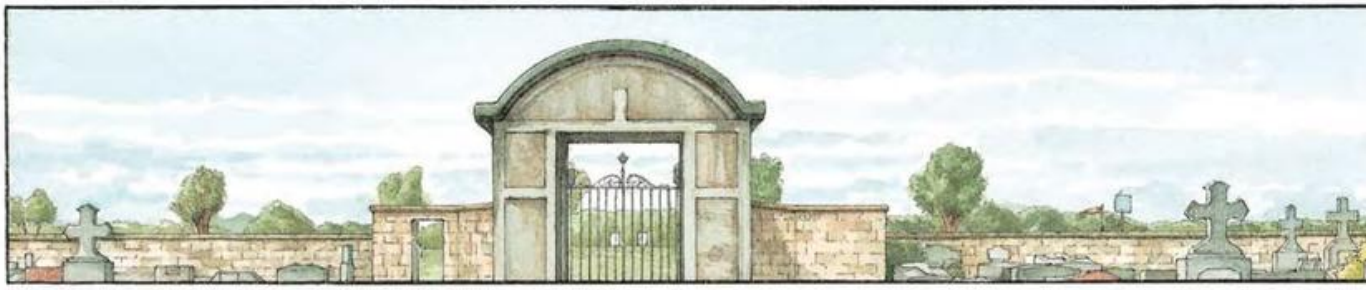
I WONDER ...
OH...!
... WHERE VAN GOGH WENT OFF TO?


HUH?
NOBODY HERE?
WOW.
THIS IS THE ROOM DAUBIGNY PAINTED FOR HIS DAUGHTER.
I SEE.
YOU CAN SENSE DAUBIGNY'S FEELINGS FOR HIS FAMILY COMING THROUGH.
IS HIS STUDIO...
... OVER THIS WAY?
OH!
IMPRESSIVE!


HERE IT IS. COROT DREW THE ORIGINAL IN CHARCOAL.
A MONUMENTAL PANEL PAINTING BORN OF THEIR MUTUAL FRIENDSHIP.

WHSS
WHSS

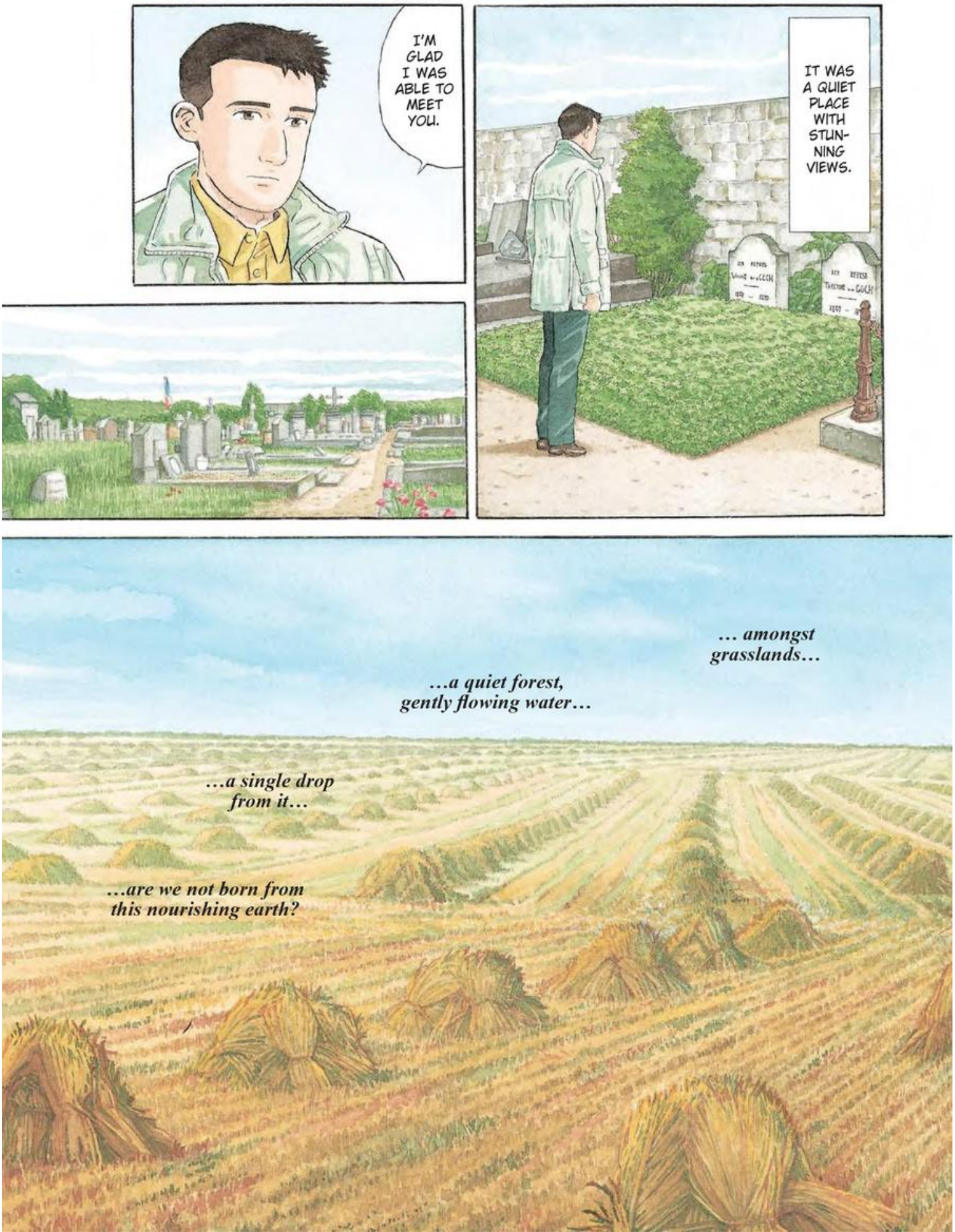
AM I REALLY HERE?
RSS
RSS
RSS

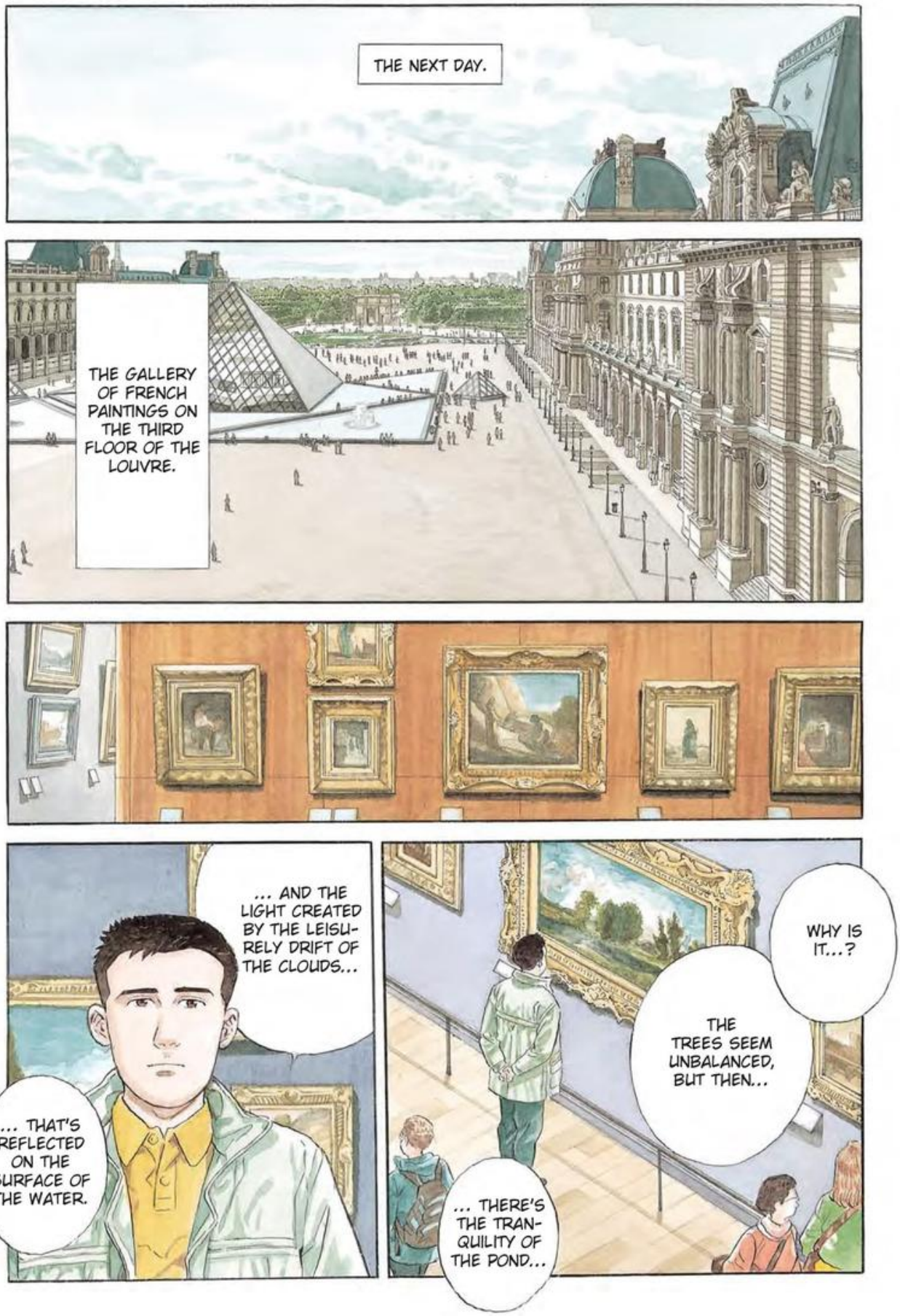


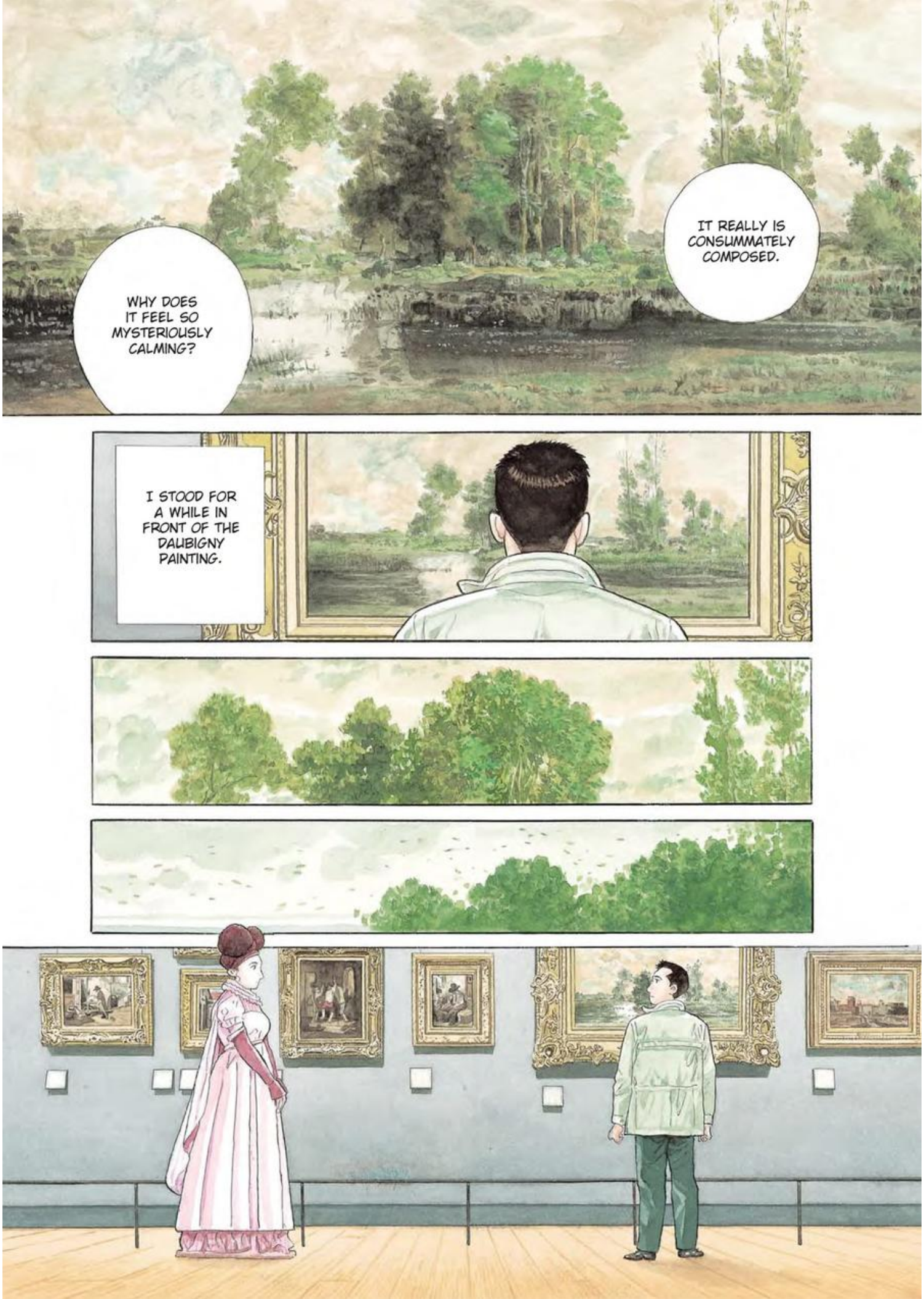
...I DECIDED TO VISIT THE CEMETERY WHERE VAN GOGH AND HIS BROTHER THEO WERE LAID TO REST.

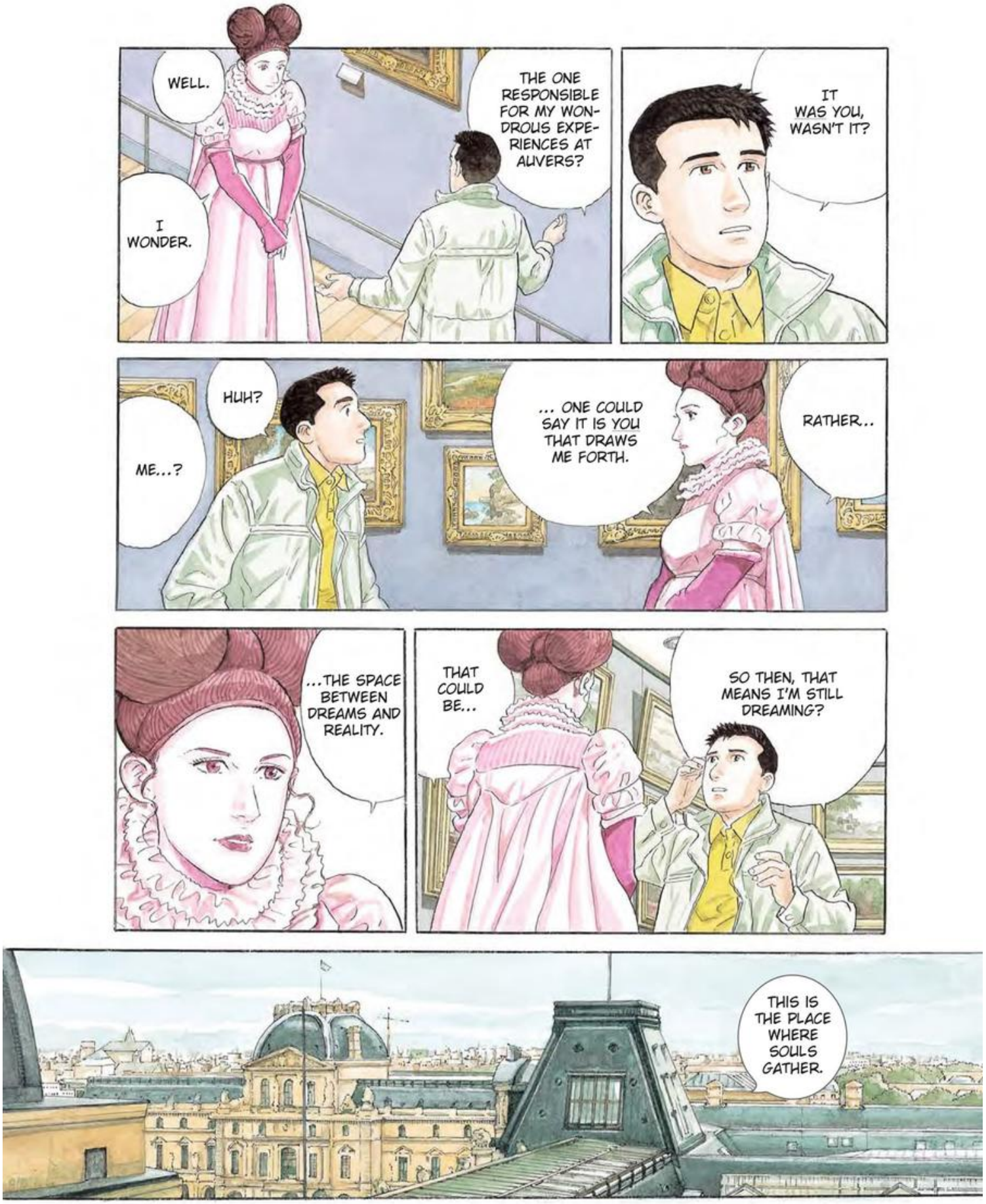
I HAD A LITTLE BIT OF TIME BEFORE THE RETURN TRAIN TO PARIS SO...

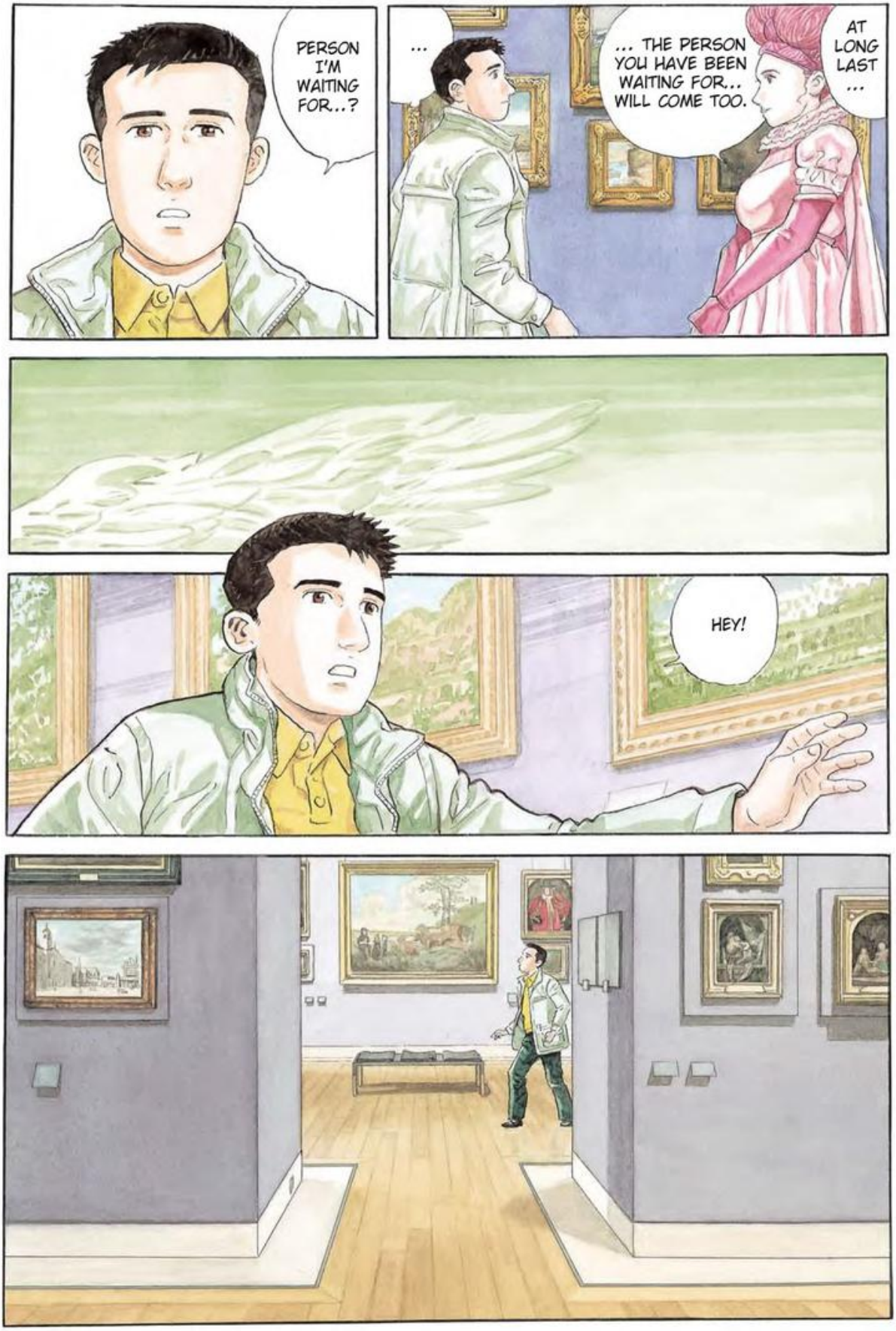
Vast, beautiful cultivated fields…


I'M GLAD I WAS ABLE TO MEET YOU.
IT WAS A QUIET PLACE WITH STUN-NING VIEWS.
… amongst grasslands…
…a quiet forest, gently flowing water…
…a single drop from it…
…are we not born from this nourishing earth?


THE NEXT DAY.
THE GALLERY OF FRENCH PAINTINGS ON THE THIRD FLOOR OF THE LOUVRE.
... AND THE LIGHT CREATED BY THE LEISURELY DRIFT OF THE CLOUDS...
... THAT'S REFLECTED ON THE SURFACE OF THE WATER.
WHY IS IT...?
THE TREES SEEM UNBALANCED, BUT THEN...
... THERE'S THE TRANQUILITY OF THE POND...

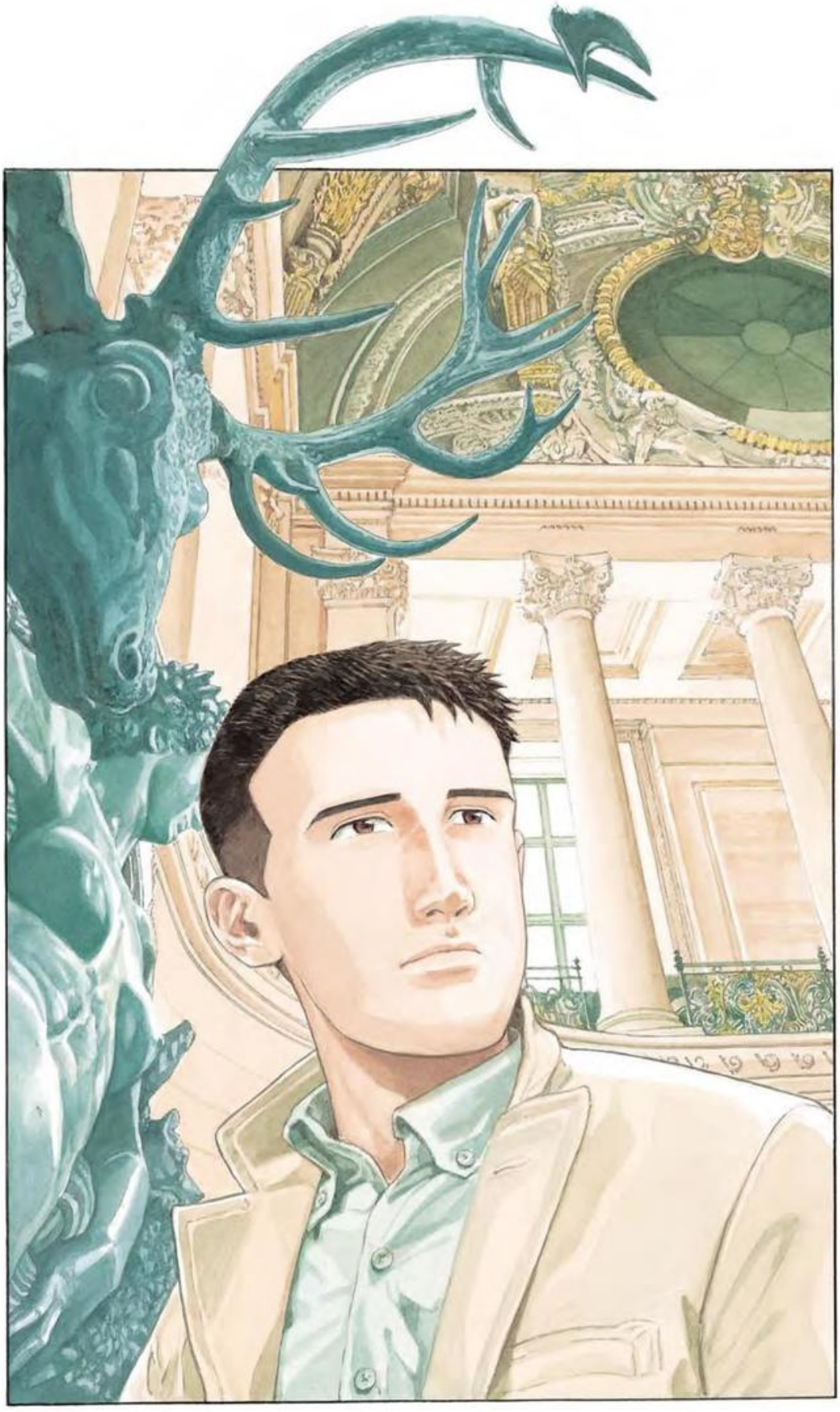

WHY DOES IT FEEL SO MYSTERIOUSLY CALMING?
IT REALLY IS CONSUMMATELY COMPOSED.
I STOOD FOR A WHILE IN FRONT OF THE DAUBIGNY PAINTING.


WELL.
I WONDER.
THE ONE RESPONSIBLE FOR MY WONDROUS EXPERIENCES AT AUVERS?
IT WAS YOU, WASN'T IT?
HUH?
ME...?
... ONE COULD SAY IT IS YOU THAT DRAWS ME FORTH.
RATHER..
...THE SPACE BETWEEN DREAMS AND REALITY.
THAT COULD BE...
SO THEN, THAT MEANS I'M STILL DREAMING?
THIS IS THE PLACE WHERE SOULS GATHER.


PERSON I'M WAITING FOR...?
...
... THE PERSON YOU HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR... WILL COME TOO.
AT LONG LAST ...
HEY!

COULD IT BE... THAT I WAS STILL IN THE BED IN MY HOTEL ROOM, SUFFERING A FEVER AND STILL ASLEEP?

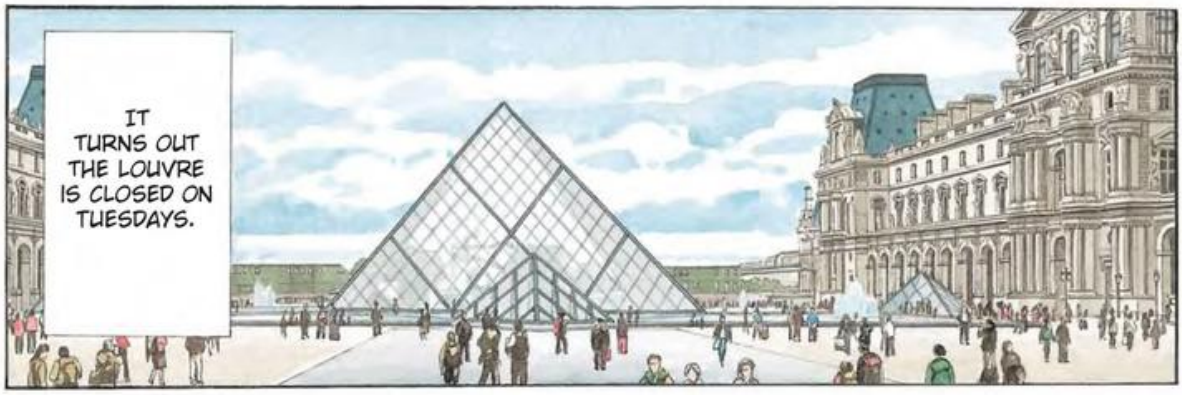
HOW DID I END UP HERE...?



CHAPTER 4

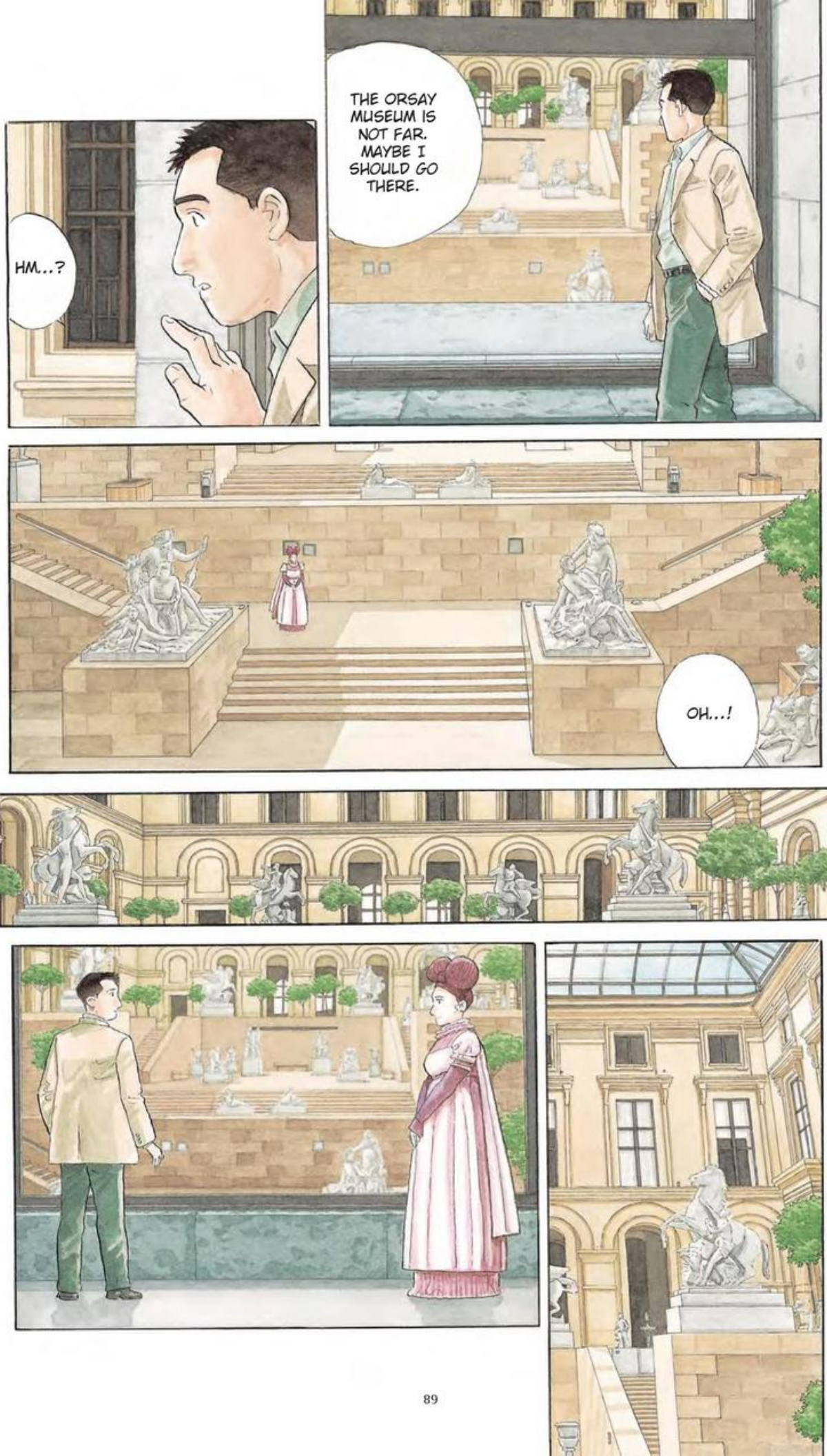
PARIS, 1939

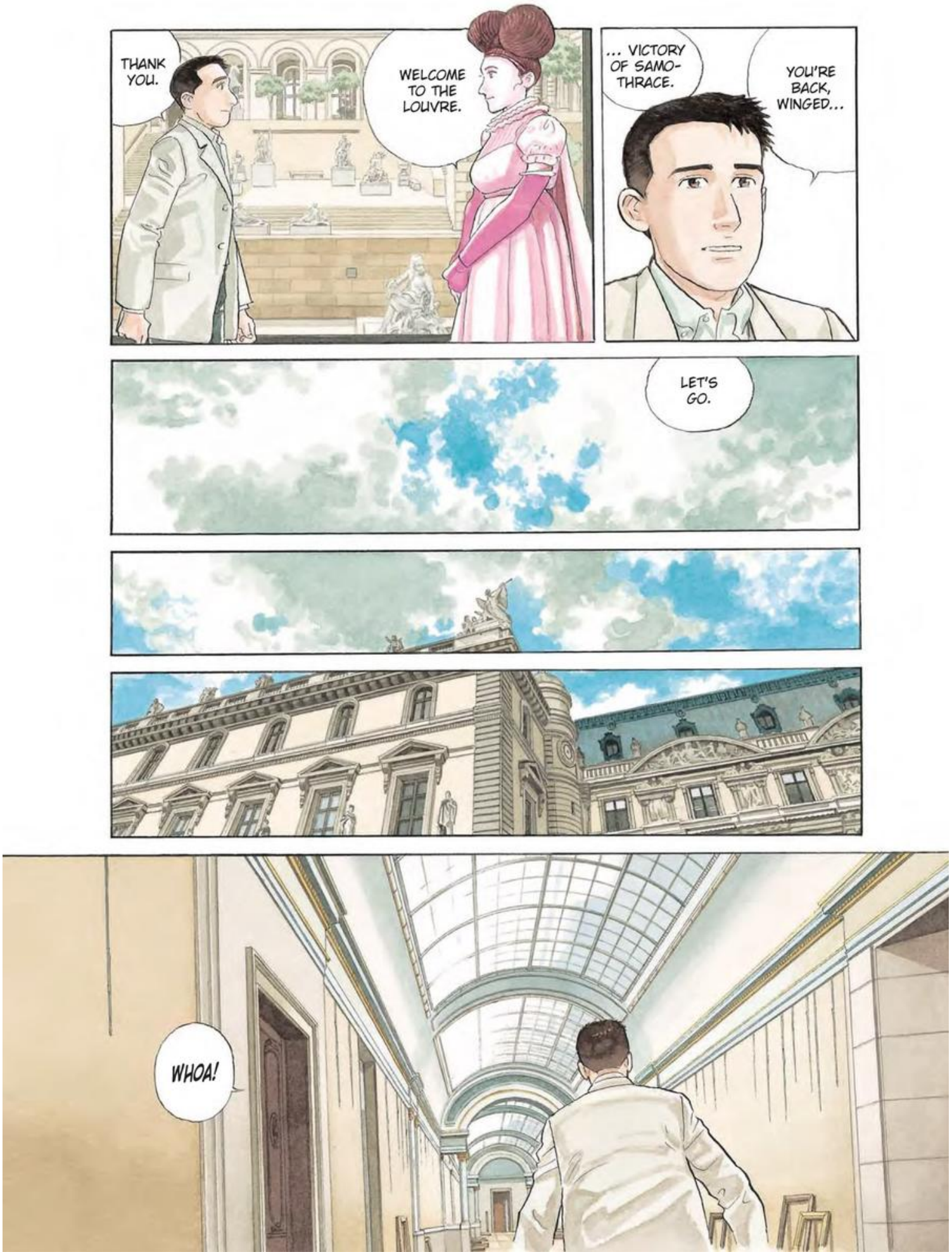
TUESDAY.


IT TURNS OUT THE LOUVRE IS CLOSED ON TUESDAYS.

WHAT NOW...?

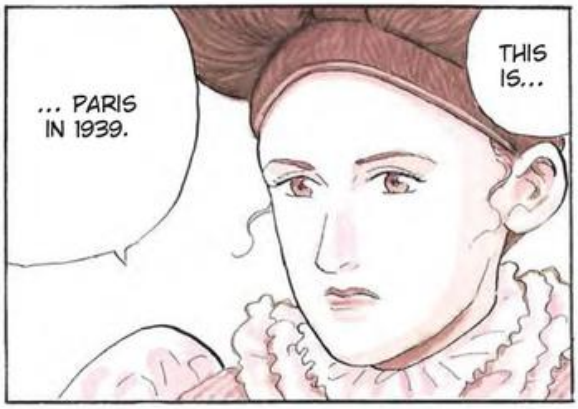
THINKING BACK, I HAD NOTICED THAT THERE WERE FEWER TOURISTS AROUND THAN USUAL.


HM...?
THE ORSAY MUSEUM IS NOT FAR. MAYBE I SHOULD GO THERE.
OH...!


THANK YOU.
WELCOME TO THE LOUVRE.
... VICTORY OF SAMO-THRACE.
YOU'RE BACK, WINGED...
LET'S GO.
WHOA!

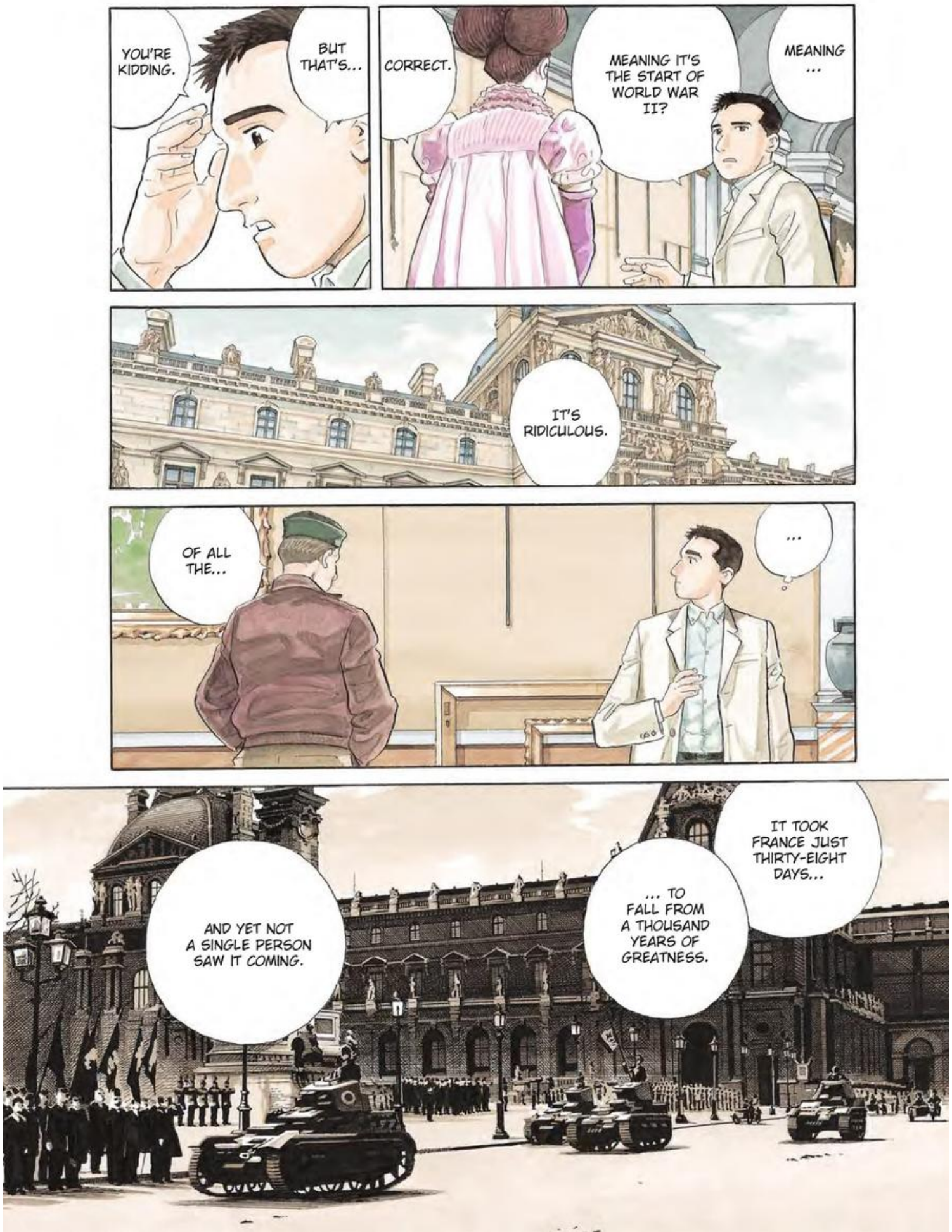
WH--
WHAT'S GOING ON...?

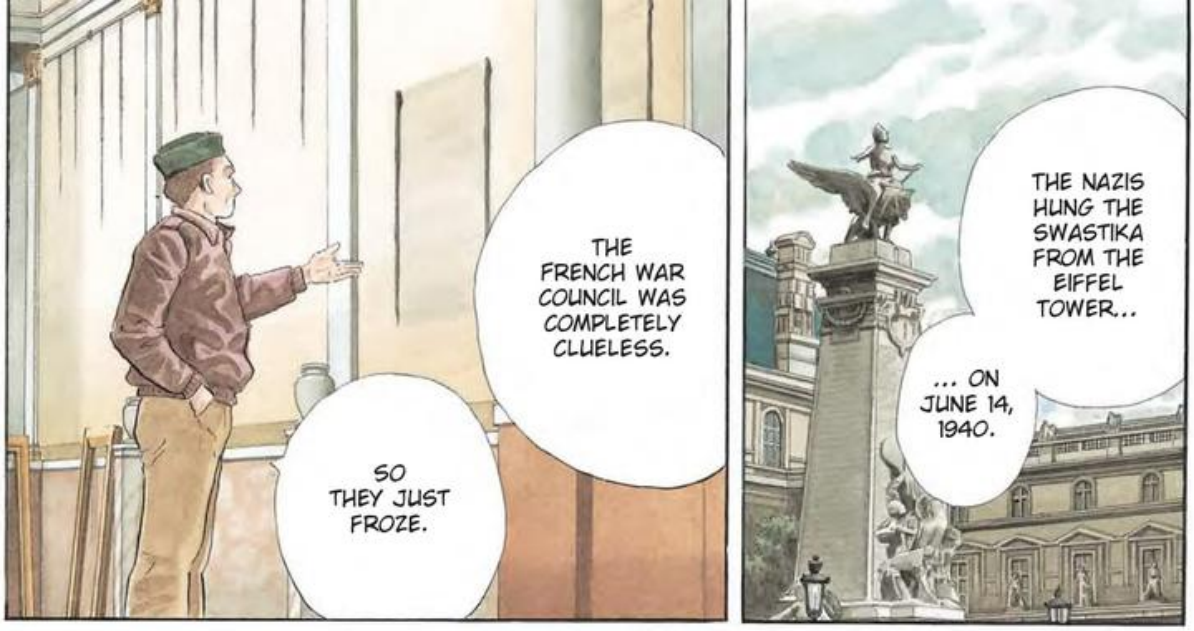
WHY IS...
... EVERYTHING ...

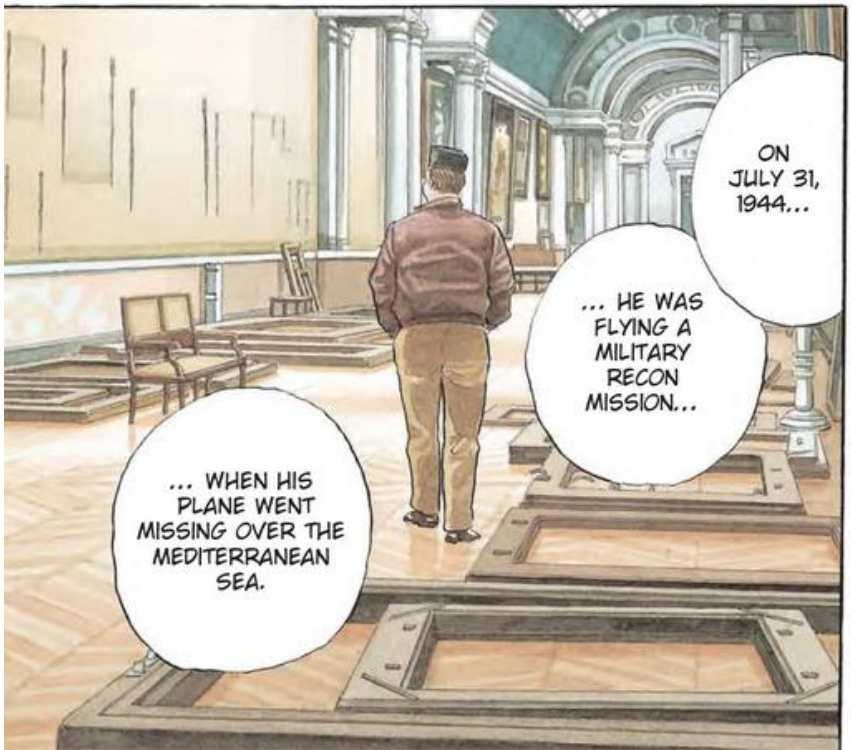

THIS IS...
... PARIS IN 1939.

THE LOUVRE'S ARTWORKS ARE BEING EVACUATED.
WHAT ...?

HUH?

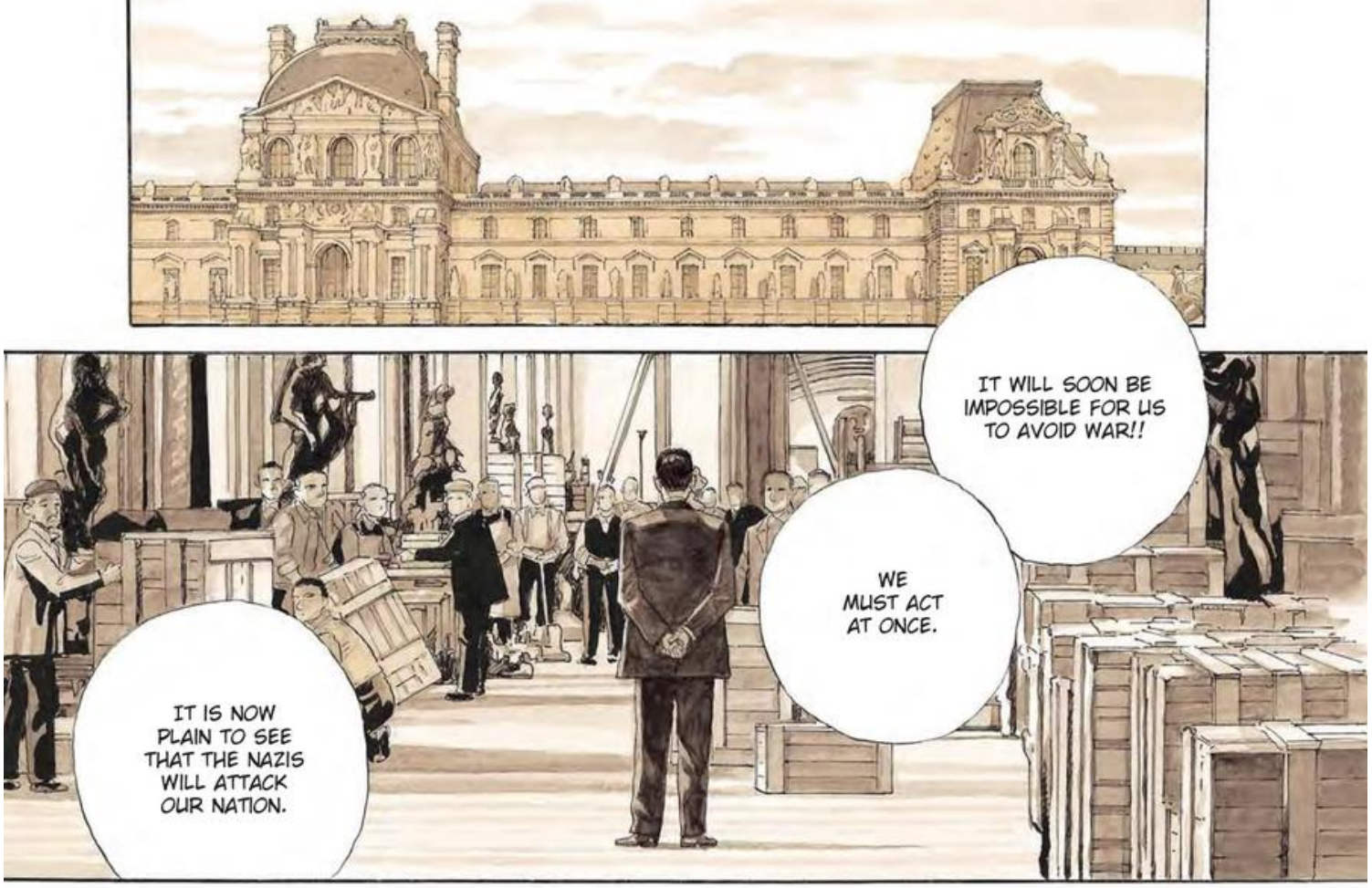

YOU'RE KIDDING.
BUT THAT'S...
CORRECT.
MEANING IT'S THE START OF WORLD WAR II?
MEANING ...
IT'S RIDICULOUS.
OF ALL THE...
...
AND YET NOT A SINGLE PERSON SAW IT COMING.
... TO FALL FROM A THOUSAND YEARS OF GREATNESS.
IT TOOK FRANCE JUST THIRTY-EIGHT DAYS...


THE FRENCH WAR COUNCIL WAS COMPLETELY CLUELESS.
SO THEY JUST FROZE.
THE NAZIS HUNG THE SWASTIKA FROM THE EIFFEL TOWER...
... ON JUNE 14, 1940.



*"THE LITTLE PRINCE"

IT'S HEART-BREAKING.
JUST LOOK AT THIS.
PATHETIC, ISN'T IT?
ONE WEEK BEFORE THE COMMENCEMENT OF HOSTILITIES...
... THEY CLOSED THE LOUVRE.
IT WAS AN OPERATION TO PROTECT THE WORKS OF ART FROM A PROBABLE GERMAN INVASION.
... OF SO MANY LARGE WORKS REALLY WAS.
BUT NOT MANY PEOPLE KNOW HOW GRUELING THE PACKING AND TRANSPORTING...
TO BE SURE, THANKS TO THIS OPERATION, MANY PIECES WERE SAVED.


IT WILL SOON BE IMPOSSIBLE FOR US TO AVOID WAR!!
WE MUST ACT AT ONCE.
IT IS NOW PLAIN TO SEE THAT THE NAZIS WILL ATTACK OUR NATION.

... BEING STOLEN OR LOST IS NOW REAL.
THE THREAT OF MANY PRECIOUS WORKS...

THE WORK OF PACKING THEM COMMENCES THIS VERY DAY, THE 25TH OF AUGUST!!

TIME IS LIMITED.
I HAVE COMPILED A LIST OF ARTWORKS TO BE TRANSPORTED FROM THE LOUVRE.

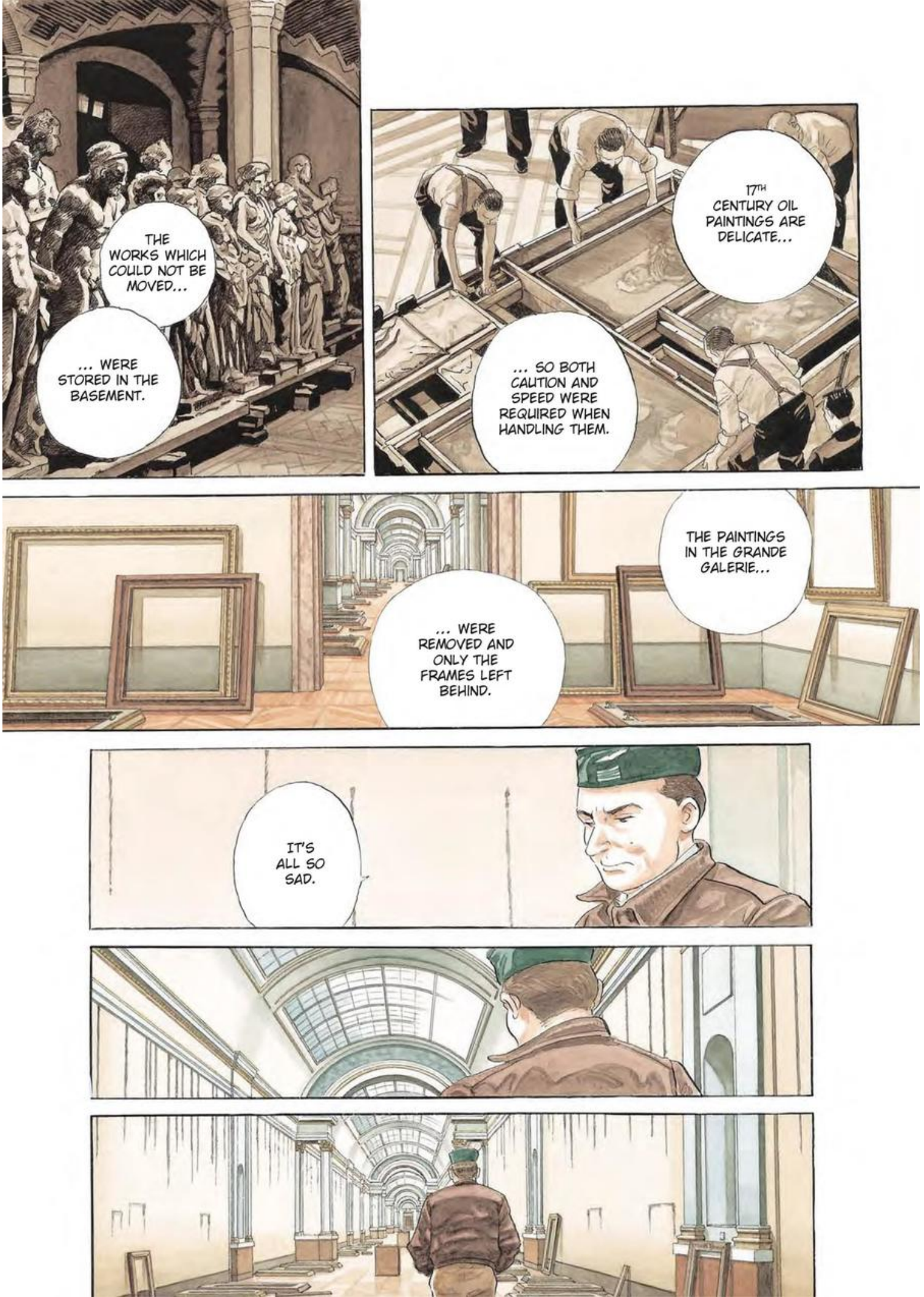
NEXT UP --
NUMBER 38!

CLANG
CLANG
CLANG
CLANG

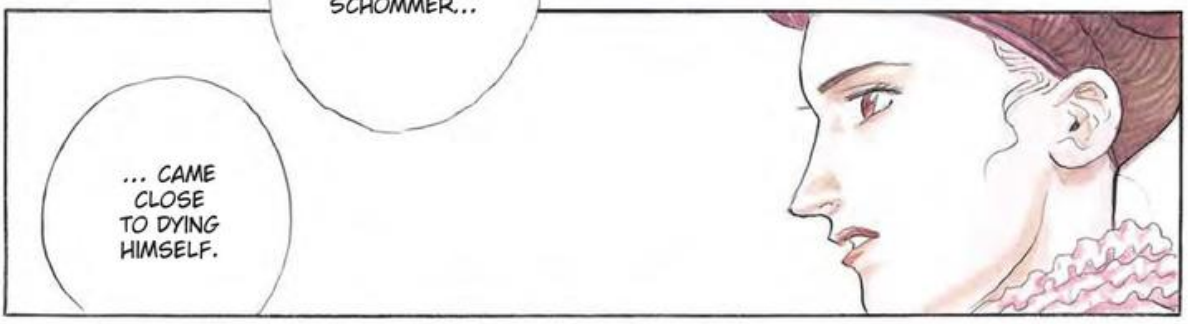
IT WAS ALL HELMED...
... BY HIM...
... JACQUES JAUJARD, DIRECTOR OF THE FRENCH NATIONAL MUSEUMS.

TO CARRY OFF THIS UNPRECEDENTED EXODUS, ALL OF THE WORKERS...
... HAD TO TOIL TWELVE HOURS A DAY.
CLOSE TO 400 MASSIVE CRATES WERE NEEDED FOR THE ARCHIVES SECTION ALONE.

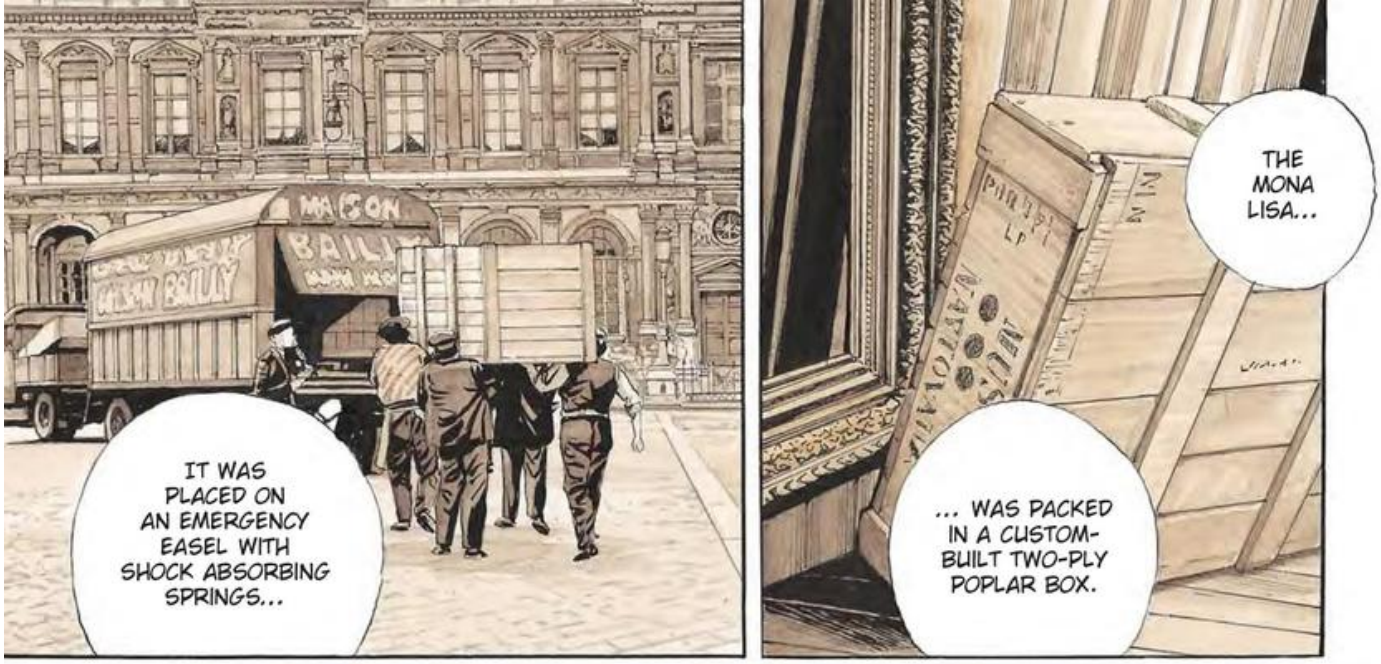
I ADMIRE HIS BRAVERY AND AMBITION.

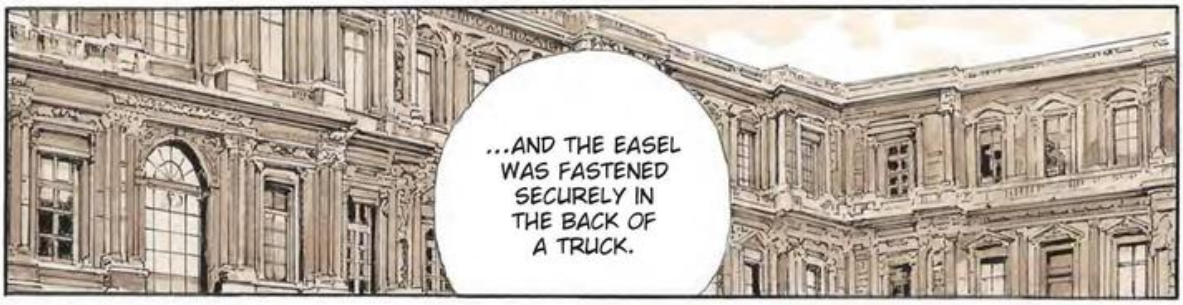

THE WORKS WHICH COULD NOT BE MOVED...
... WERE STORED IN THE BASEMENT.
17TH CENTURY OIL PAINTINGS ARE DELICATE...
... SO BOTH CAUTION AND SPEED WERE REQUIRED WHEN HANDLING THEM.
THE PAINTINGS IN THE GRANDE GALERIE...
... WERE REMOVED AND ONLY THE FRAMES LEFT BEHIND.
IT'S ALL SO SAD.

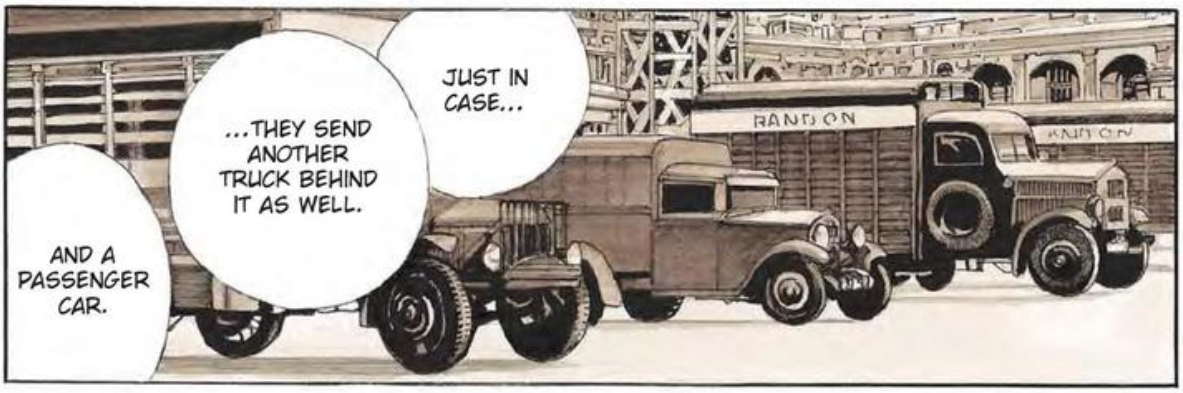
THEY WERE READY TO RISK EVERYTHING TO EVACUATE THE PAINTINGS.


THE TRANSPORT CHIEF PIERRE SCHOMMER...
... CAME CLOSE TO DYING HIMSELF.

IT WAS WHEN THEY WERE MOVING...
... THE MOST FAMOUS OIL PAINTING IN THE WORLD.

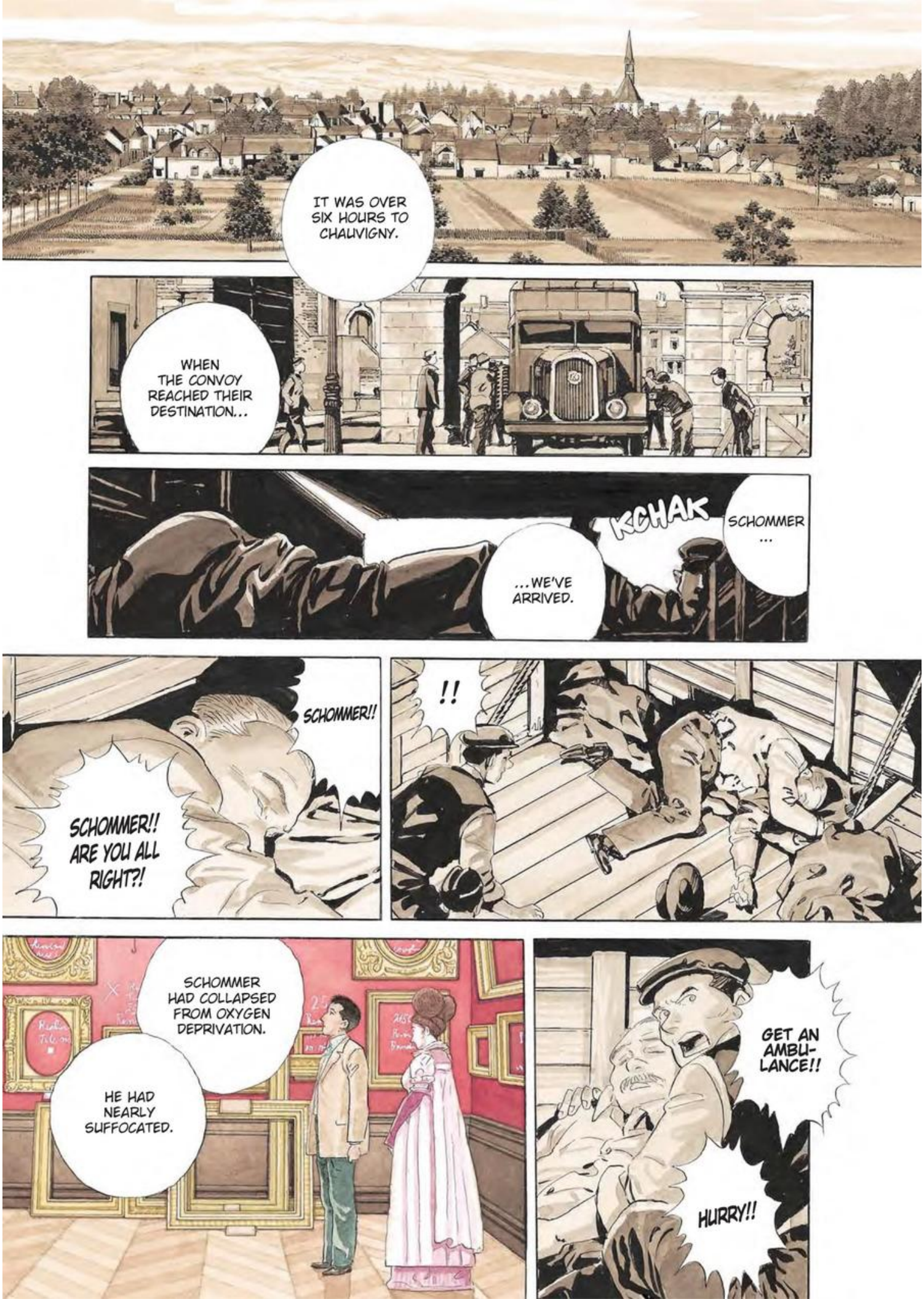

IT WAS PLACED ON AN EMERGENCY EASEL WITH SHOCK ABSORBING SPRINGS...
THE MONA LISA...
... WAS PACKED IN A CUSTOM-BUILT TWO-PLY POPLAR BOX.


...AND THE EASEL WAS FASTENED SECURELY IN THE BACK OF A TRUCK.


...THEY SEND ANOTHER TRUCK BEHIND IT AS WELL.
JUST IN CASE...
AND A PASSENGER CAR.

I WILL SIT BESIDE THE PAINTING.
I MUST PROTECT THE MONA LISA!!
SIR..
... I WOULD RIDE IN THE PASSENGER SEAT AND FOLLOW BEHIND, BUT I'M GOING IN THE TRUCK.
NOR-MALLY...
... THAT'S MAD.

ISON
SLAM
DO IT!!
I'M FINE.
ARE YOU READY?
I'M CLOSING THE DOOR.
ALL THE GAPS WERE CLOSED UP IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN A STEADY TEMPERATURE INSIDE THE TRUCK.
VAROOM
THAT ALMOST LED TO DISASTER.
BRRRMMM
HE STAYED THERE THE ENTIRE TIME...
... IN THE PITCH BLACK TRUCK BED.


IT WAS OVER SIX HOURS TO CHAUVIGNY.
WHEN THE CONVOY REACHED THEIR DESTINATION...
KCHAK
SCHOMMER ...
...WE'VE ARRIVED.
SCHOMMER!!
SCHOMMER!! ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?!
!!
SCHOMMER HAD COLLAPSED FROM OXYGEN DEPRIVATION.
HE HAD NEARLY SUFFOCATED.
GET AN AMBU-LANCE!!
HURRY!!

IN HERE...
... HUNG ONE OF THE LARGEST PAINTINGS IN THE LOUVRE.
SEVEN METERS WIDE AND FIVE METERS HIGH.

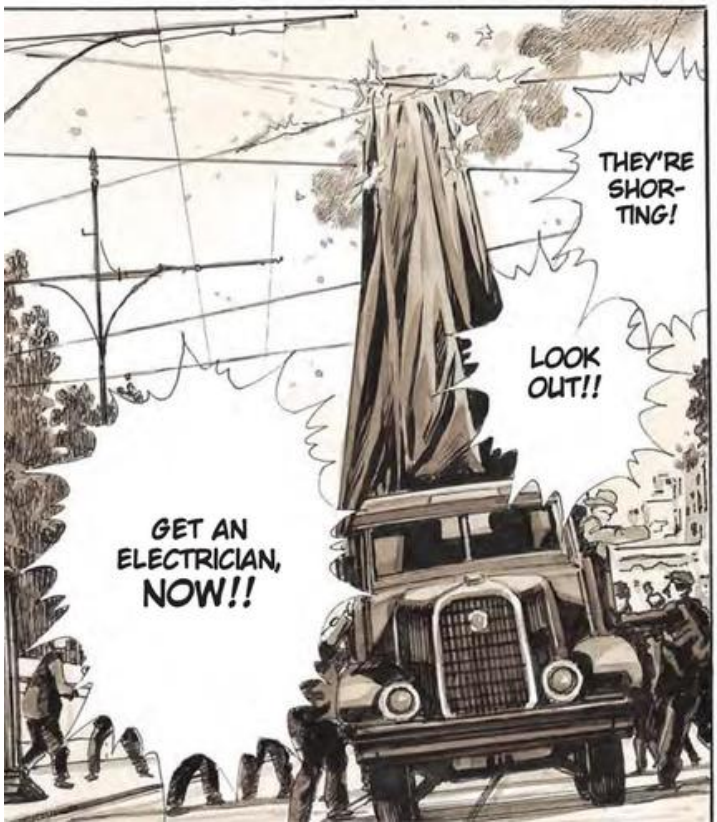
THEY THEN LOADED IT ONTO A SCENERY TRUCK...
... BORROWED FROM THE COMÉDIE-FRANÇAISE.

"THE RAFT OF THE MEDUSA" BY GÉRICAULT.
IF THEY ROLLED THE CANVAS, IT WOULD HAVE CRACKED EASILY.
SO, AS WITH OTHER LARGE-SCALE PAINTINGS, THEY LEFT IT SET IN ITS FRAME AND COVERED IT WITH CLOTH.

THE TRANSPORT TEAM'S TRIP SEEMED TO BE GOING SMOOTHLY...
... BUT THEN RAN INTO TROUBLE IN FRONT OF THE VERSAILLES TOWN HALL.

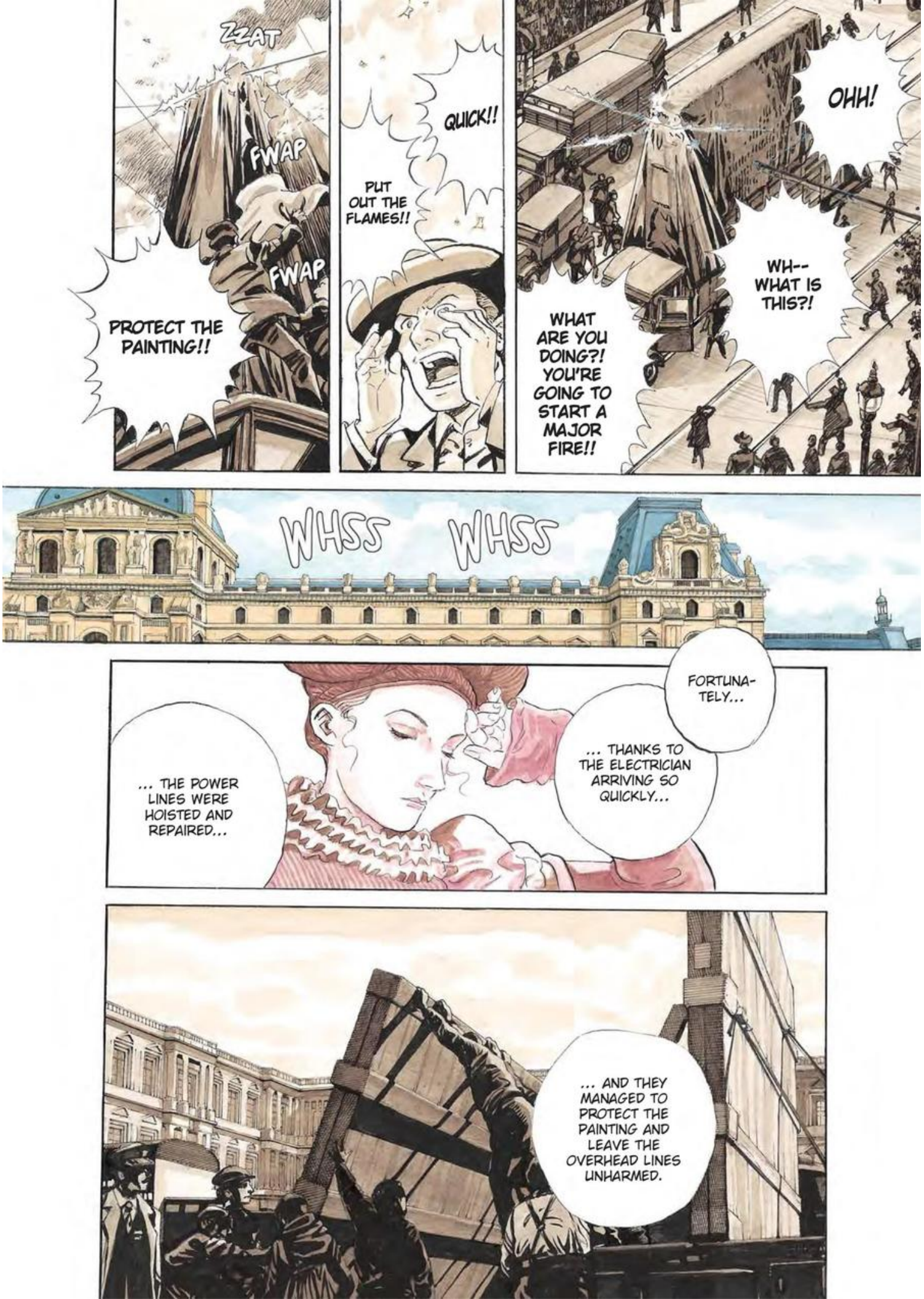
GZZT
GZZT

AAH!
WHOA!
WHAT'S WRONG?!
WHAT JUST HAPPENED?!


THEY'RE SHORTING!
LOOK OUT!!
GET AN ELECTRICIAN, NOW!!

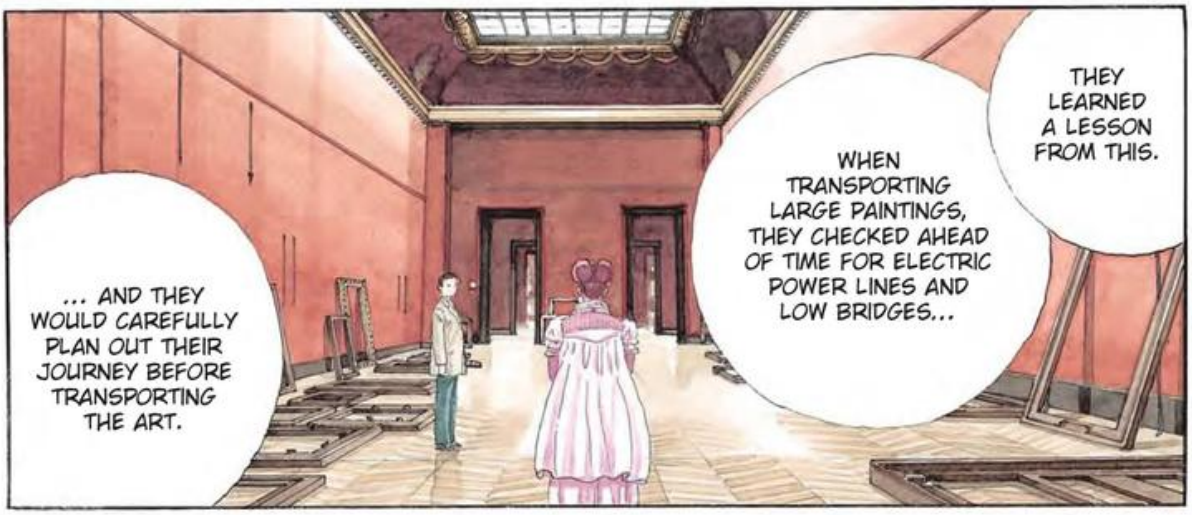
THE CANVAS IS TOUCHING THE POWER LINES!!
OH, NO!

GZZT
ZZAT
BZZT


ZZAT
FWAP
FWAP
PROTECT THE PAINTING!!
QUICK!!
PUT OUT THE FLAMES!!
OHH!
WH-- WHAT IS THIS?!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?! YOU'RE GOING TO START A MAJOR FIRE!!
WHSS WHSS
FORTUNA-TELY...
... THANKS TO THE ELECTRICIAN ARRIVING SO QUICKLY...
... THE POWER LINES WERE HOISTED AND REPAIRED...
... AND THEY MANAGED TO PROTECT THE PAINTING AND LEAVE THE OVERHEAD LINES UNHARMED.

AS A RESULT, "THE RAFT OF THE MEDUSA"...
... DID NOT GO TO CHAMBORD AS PLANNED...

... BUT WAS TAKEN TO THE PALACE OF VERSAILLES AND PUT IN A BOMB SHELTER.


THEY LEARNED A LESSON FROM THIS.
WHEN TRANSPORTING LARGE PAINTINGS, THEY CHECKED AHEAD OF TIME FOR ELECTRIC POWER LINES AND LOW BRIDGES...
... AND THEY WOULD CAREFULLY PLAN OUT THEIR JOURNEY BEFORE TRANSPORTING THE ART.

AND AS AN EXTRA PRECAUTION, THEY BROUGHT AN ELECTRICIAN WITH THEM...

... ALL IN ORDER TO PROTECT THE LOUVRE'S ARTWORKS FROM THE NAZIS.

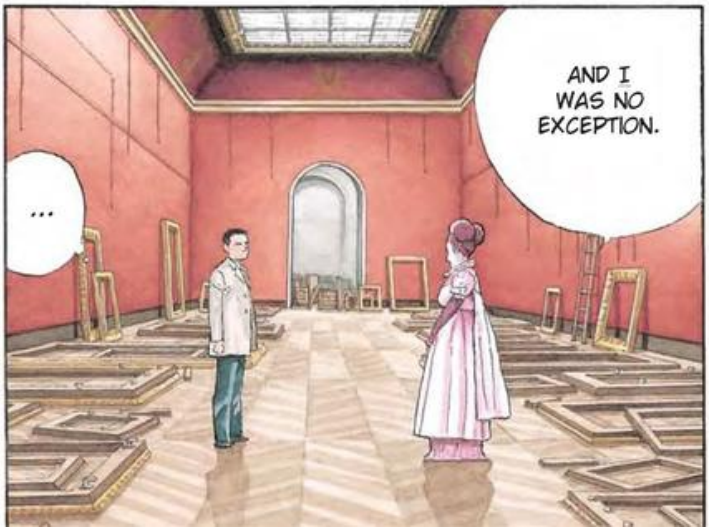
I WANTED YOU TO KNOW HOW MUCH HARD WORK AND DRIVE THE MUSEUM STAFF PUT IN BACK THEN.

YES.
... WITNESS ALL OF THAT?
DID YOU...

...

... I SAW ALL OF IT.

WHEN I THINK BACK ON IT, EVEN NOW THE TEARS WELL UP.

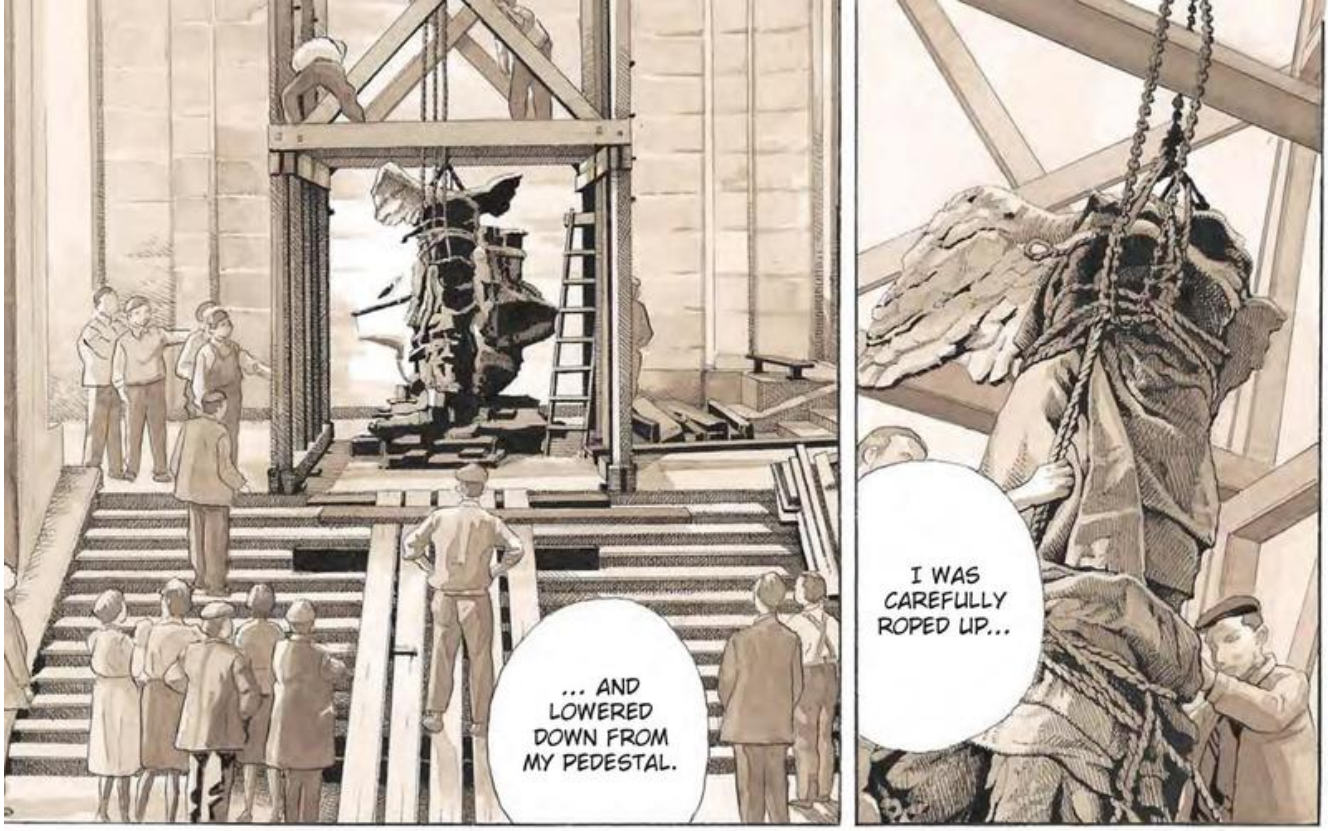

...
AND I WAS NO EXCEPTION.

IT CAN'T BE HELPED.
THERE'S NO WAY TO PROTECT IT EXCEPT TO RELOCATE IT.
WHAT DO WE DO...
... SIR?

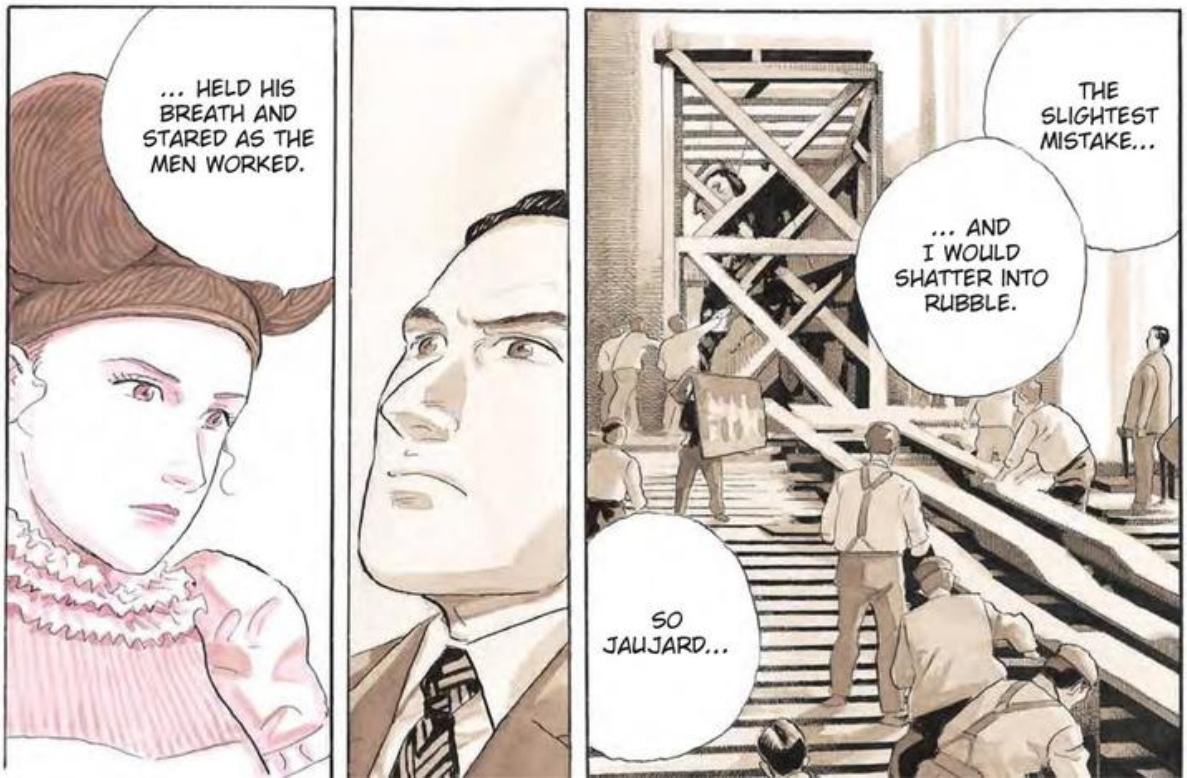
THIS STATUE IS THE LOUVRE'S SYMBOL OF VICTORY!
IT MUST NEVER BE ALLOWED TO FALL INTO THE HANDS OF THE NAZIS!!

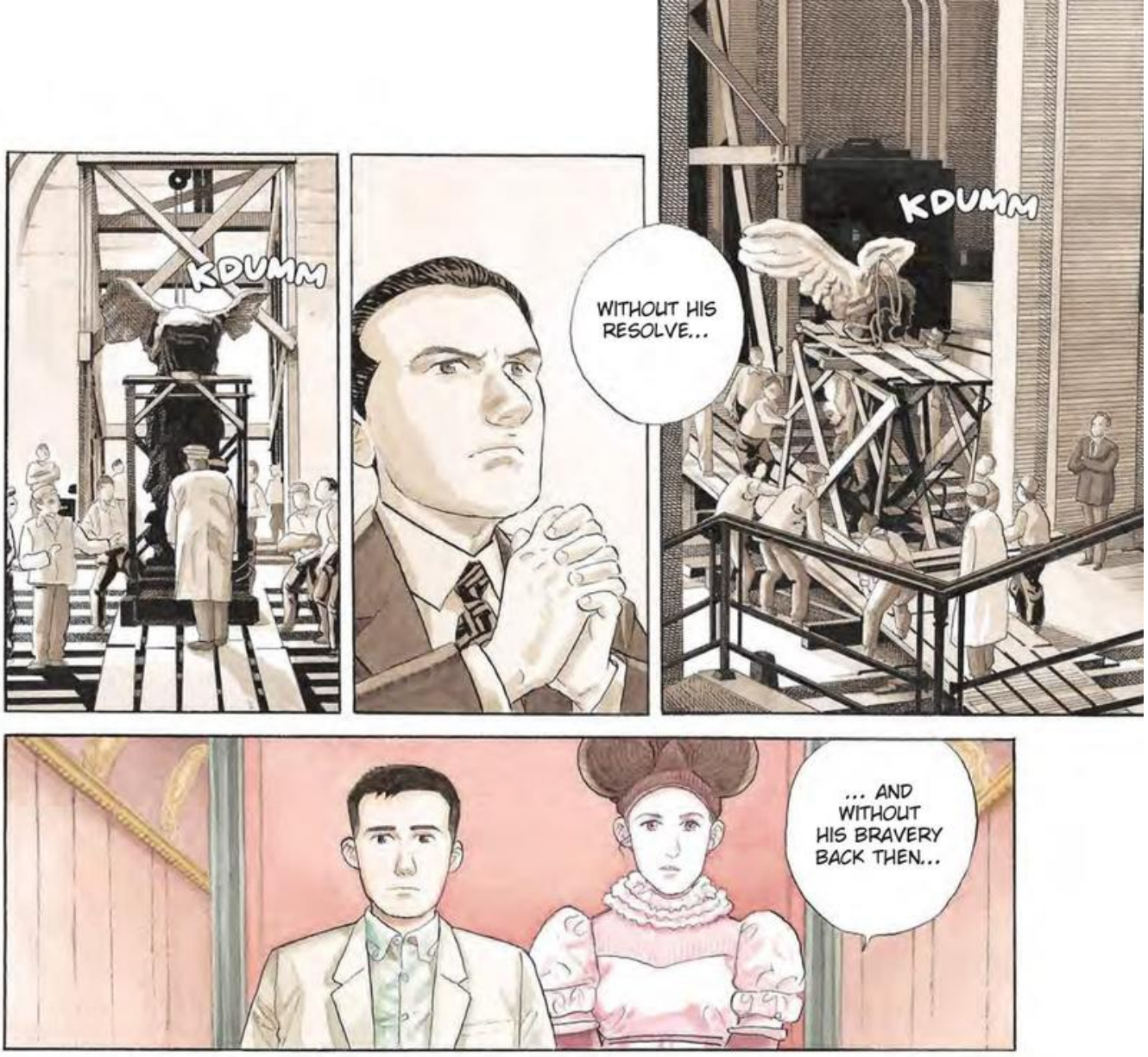
I WILL PIT MY LIFE AGAINST HER PROTECTION!!

I WILL TAKE RESPONSIBILITY.
THERE IS NOTHING TO FEAR.
TRANSPORT IT OUT OF HERE RIGHT AWAY!!

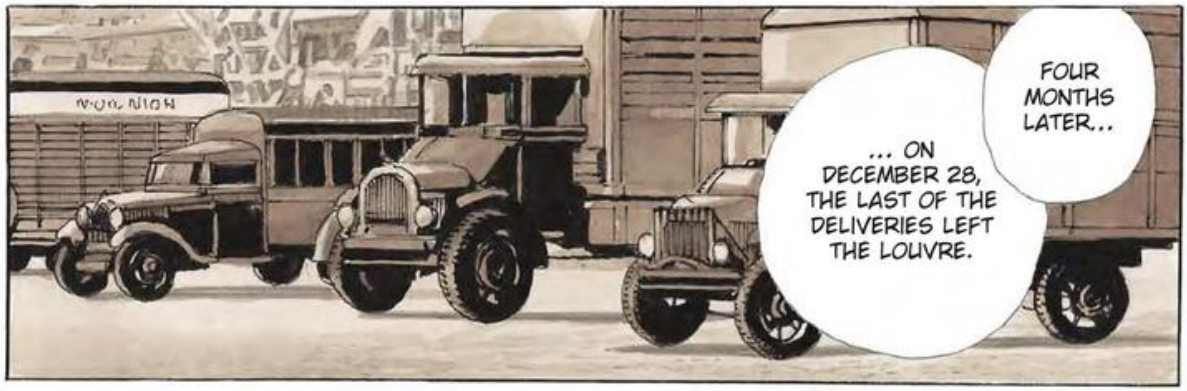

... AND LOWERED DOWN FROM MY PEDESTAL.
I WAS CAREFULLY ROPED UP...

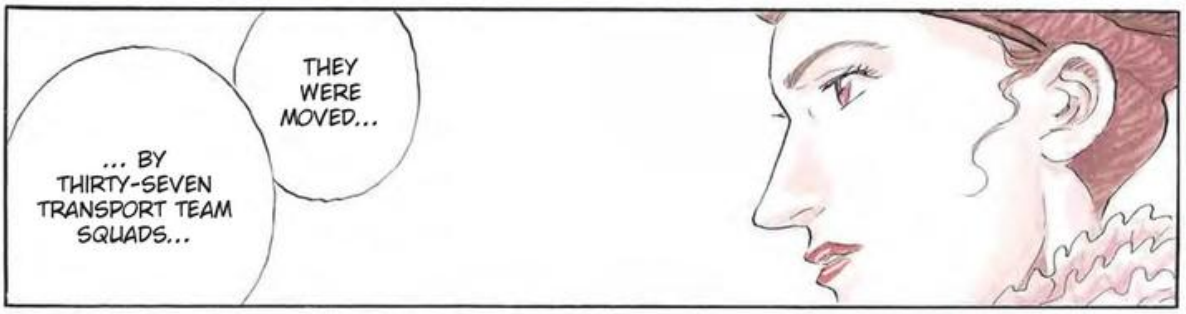
MUCH TIME WAS SPENT CONNECTING THE FRAGMENTS BACK TOGETHER WITH GYPSUM PLASTER.
... HAD BEEN PUT TOGETHER FROM THOUSANDS OF PIECES OF EXCAVATED MARBLE.
MY BODY...

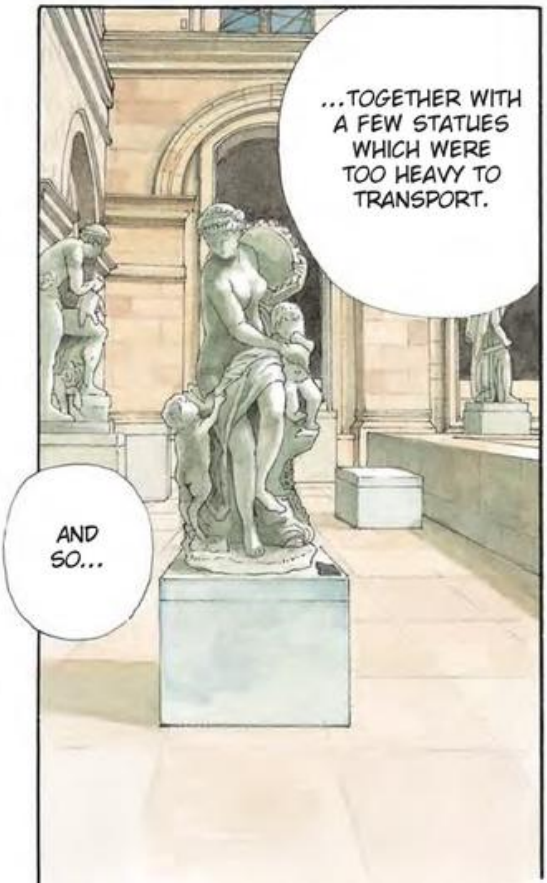

... HELD HIS BREATH AND STARED AS THE MEN WORKED.
SO JAUJARD...
... AND I WOULD SHATTER INTO RUBBLE.
THE SLIGHTEST MISTAKE...


KDUMM
WITHOUT HIS RESOLVE...
KDUMM
... AND WITHOUT HIS BRAVERY BACK THEN...
... I MIGHT NO LONGER BE...
... ON THAT LANDING OF THE CENTRAL STAIRCASE.

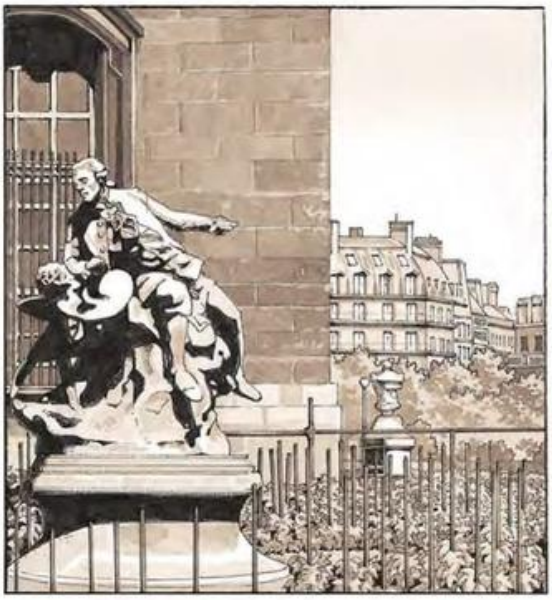
ON AUGUST 28, 1939, THE FIRST UNIT OF TRANSPORT TEAMS SETS OFF.


FOUR MONTHS LATER...
... ON DECEMBER 28, THE LAST OF THE DELIVERIES LEFT THE LOUVRE.


THEY WERE MOVED...
... BY THIRTY-SEVEN TRANSPORT TEAM SQUADS...


...TOGETHER WITH A FEW STATUES WHICH WERE TOO HEAVY TO TRANSPORT.
AND SO...

... OF FIVE TO EIGHT TRUCKS EACH.
AND, THOUGH THERE WERE VERY FEW, ...
...THOSE PAINTINGS WHICH WERE NOT REMOVED WERE LEFT IN THE BASEMENT...



... HERE THEY REMAINED ...
... LEFT JUST AS THEY WERE.

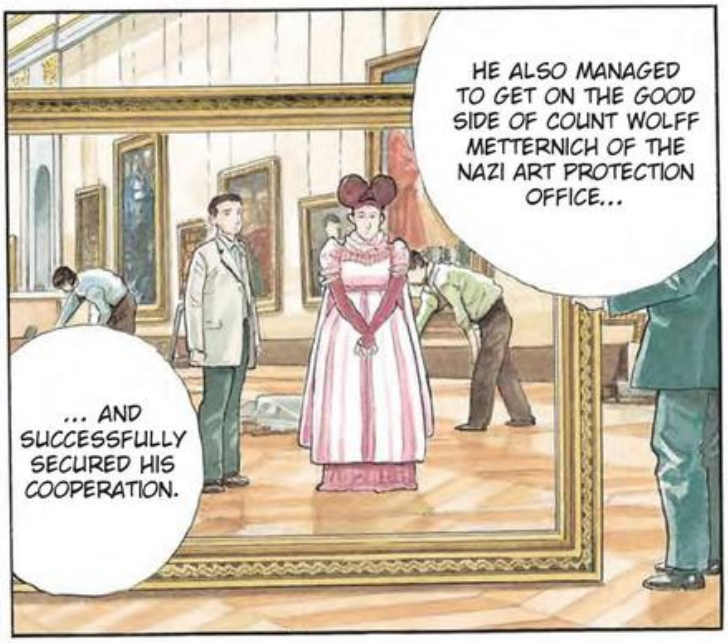
THEN, ABOUT FIVE MONTHS LATER..

... THE GERMANS COMMENCED THEIR ADVANCE WESTWARD. IN JUNE THEY REACHED THE RIVER SOMME.

SWEPT AWAY BY THE GERMAN ARMY'S BLITZKRIEG...
... THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT FLED PARIS.

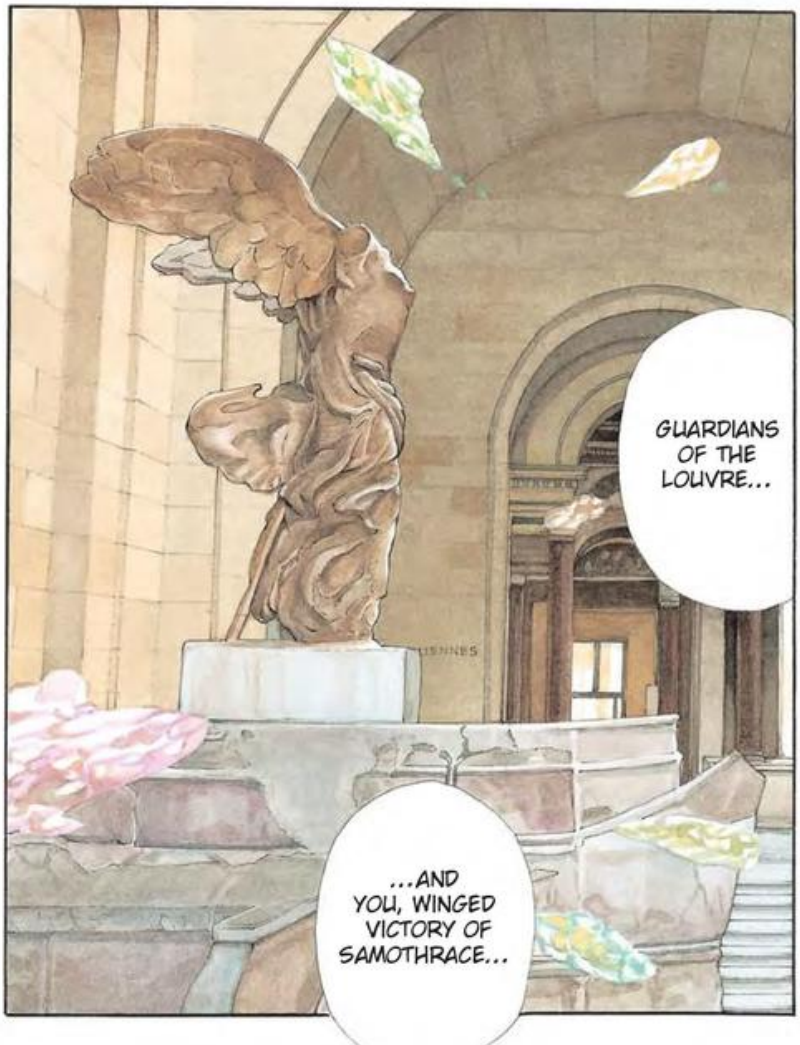
AND SO JAUJARD...
... GAVE ORDERS FOR THE ARTWORKS TO BE MOVED FURTHER SOUTHWEST.

JAUJARD'S METICULOUSNESS AND DARING, AND HIS READY DETERMINATION BROUGHT MUCH GOOD LUCK.

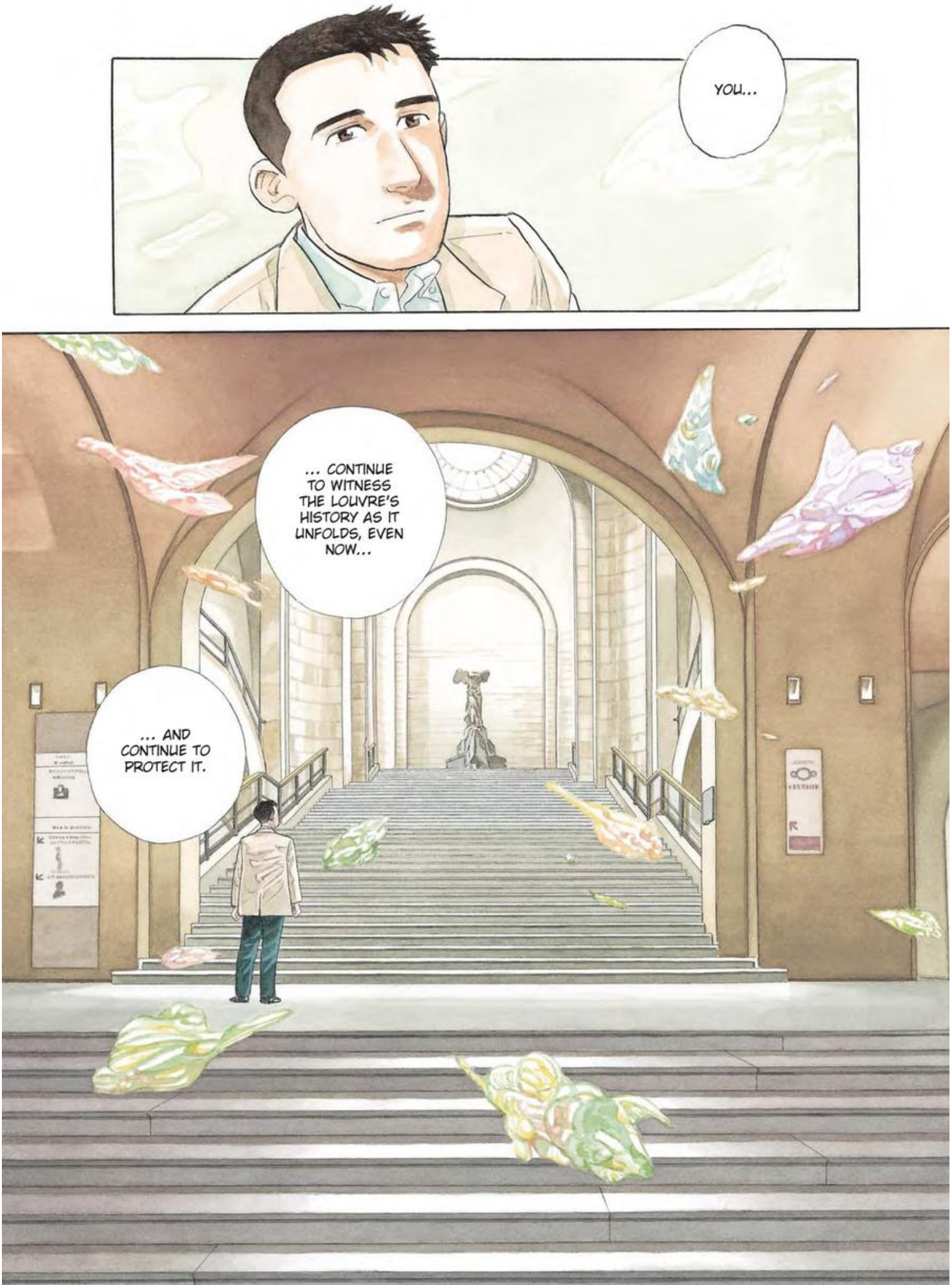

HE ALSO MANAGED TO GET ON THE GOOD SIDE OF COUNT WOLFF METTERNICH OF THE NAZI ART PROTECTION OFFICE...
... AND SUCCESSFULLY SECURED HIS COOPERATION.

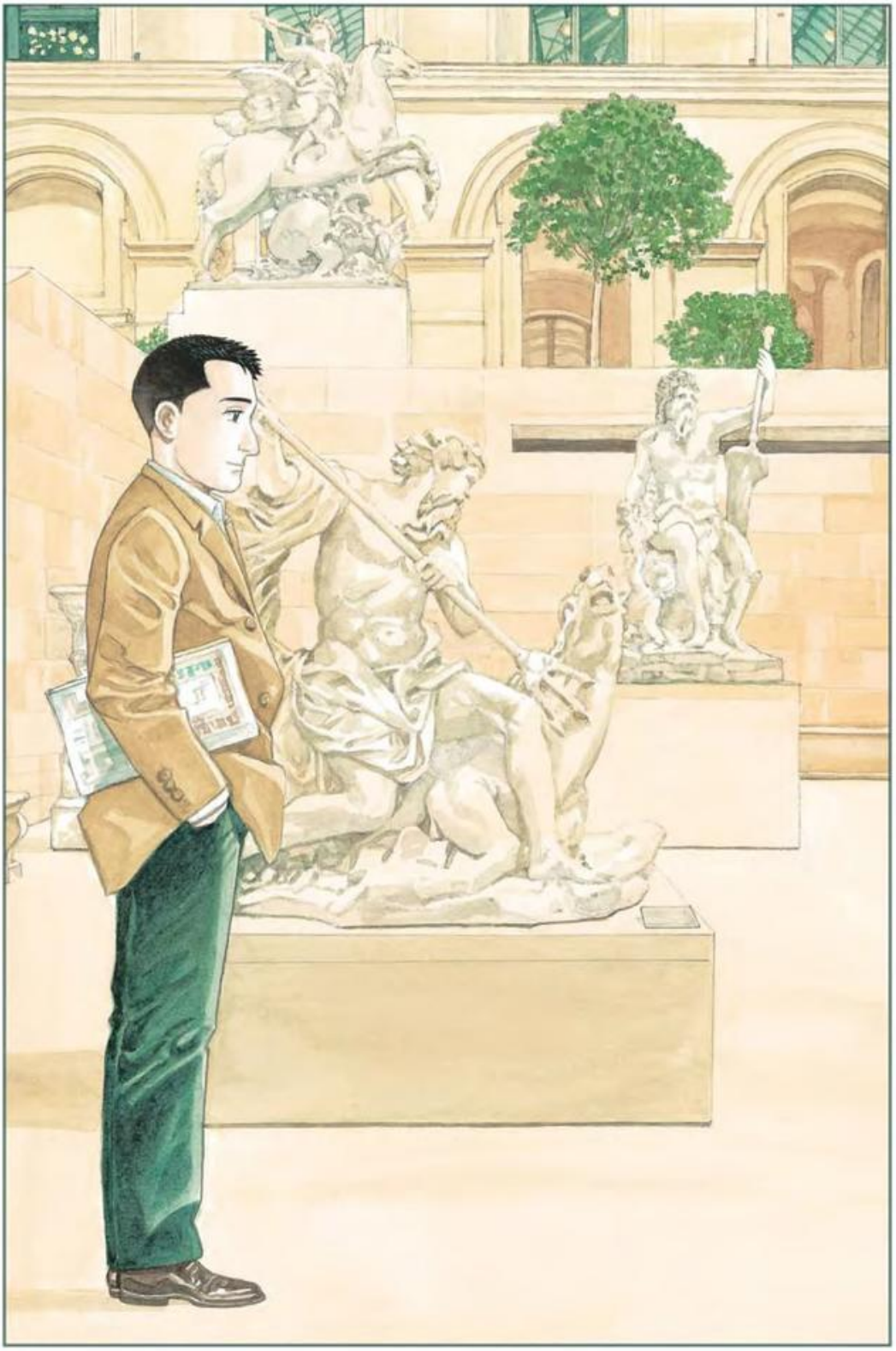
IN THIS WAY...
... MANY OF THE LOUVRE'S ARTWORKS WERE SAVED FROM PLUNDERING.

HOW-EVER..
... THESE EXPLOITS REMAIN NOT VERY WELL KNOWN.
BUT WE KNOW THEM.
HE WAS NOT COWED ...
... BY THE MANY NAZI THREATS.
LUCK DID HAVE SOMETHING TO DO WITH IT OF COURSE...
... BUT WITHOUT JAUJARD, THIS OPERATION WOULD LIKELY NOT HAVE BEEN A SUCCESS.


GUARDIANS OF THE LOUVRE...
...AND YOU, WINGED VICTORY OF SAMOTHRACE...

THANK YOU...

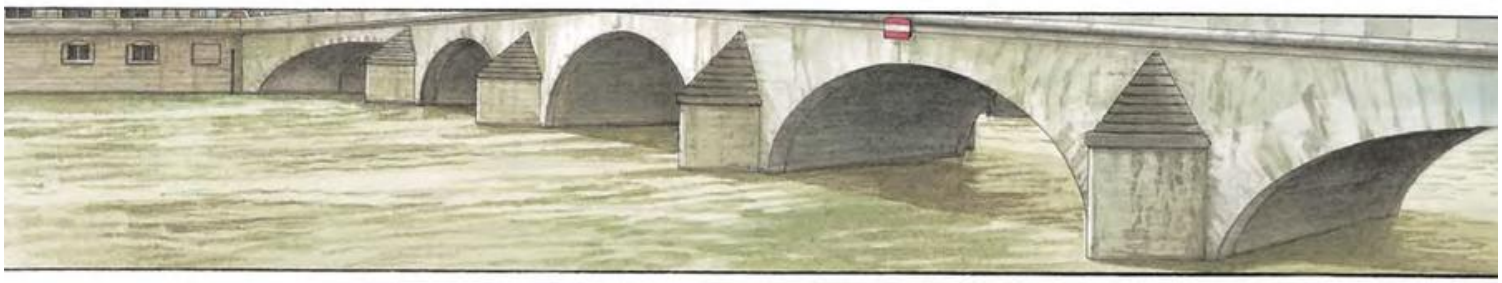

YOU...
... CONTINUE TO WITNESS THE LOUVRE'S HISTORY AS IT UNFOLDS, EVEN NOW...
... AND CONTINUE TO PROTECT IT.

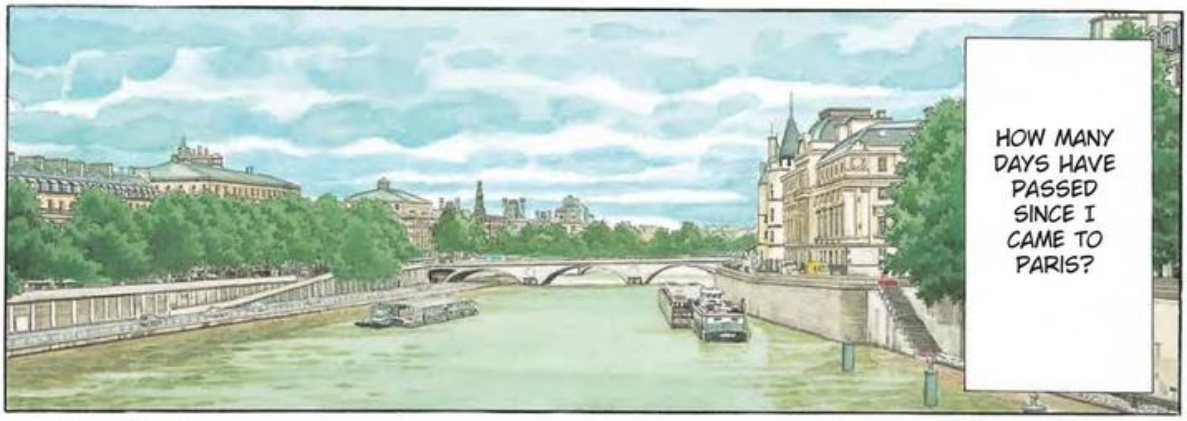


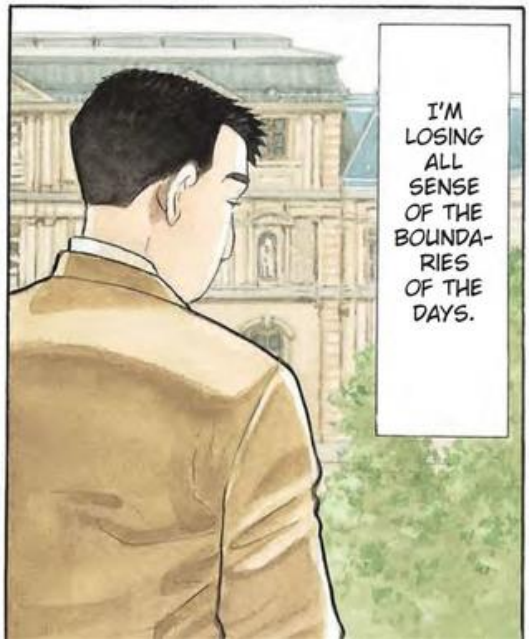
FINAL CHAPTER

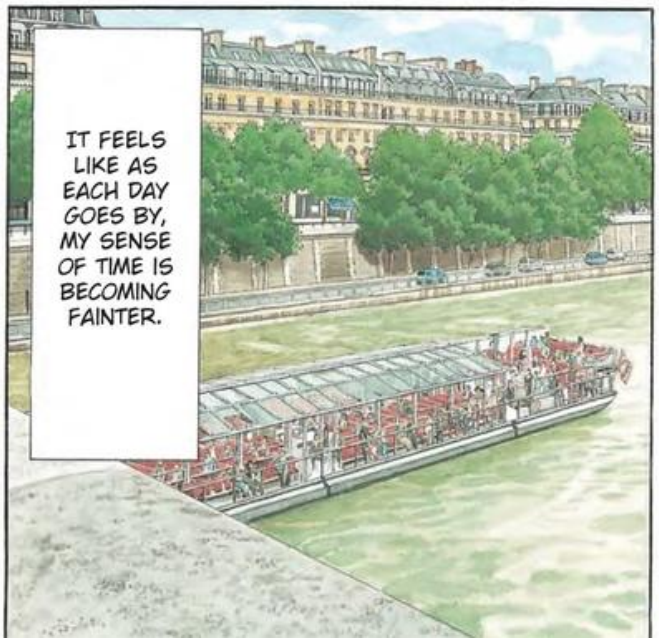
TRAVELER IN A PALACE OF A THOUSAND YEARS

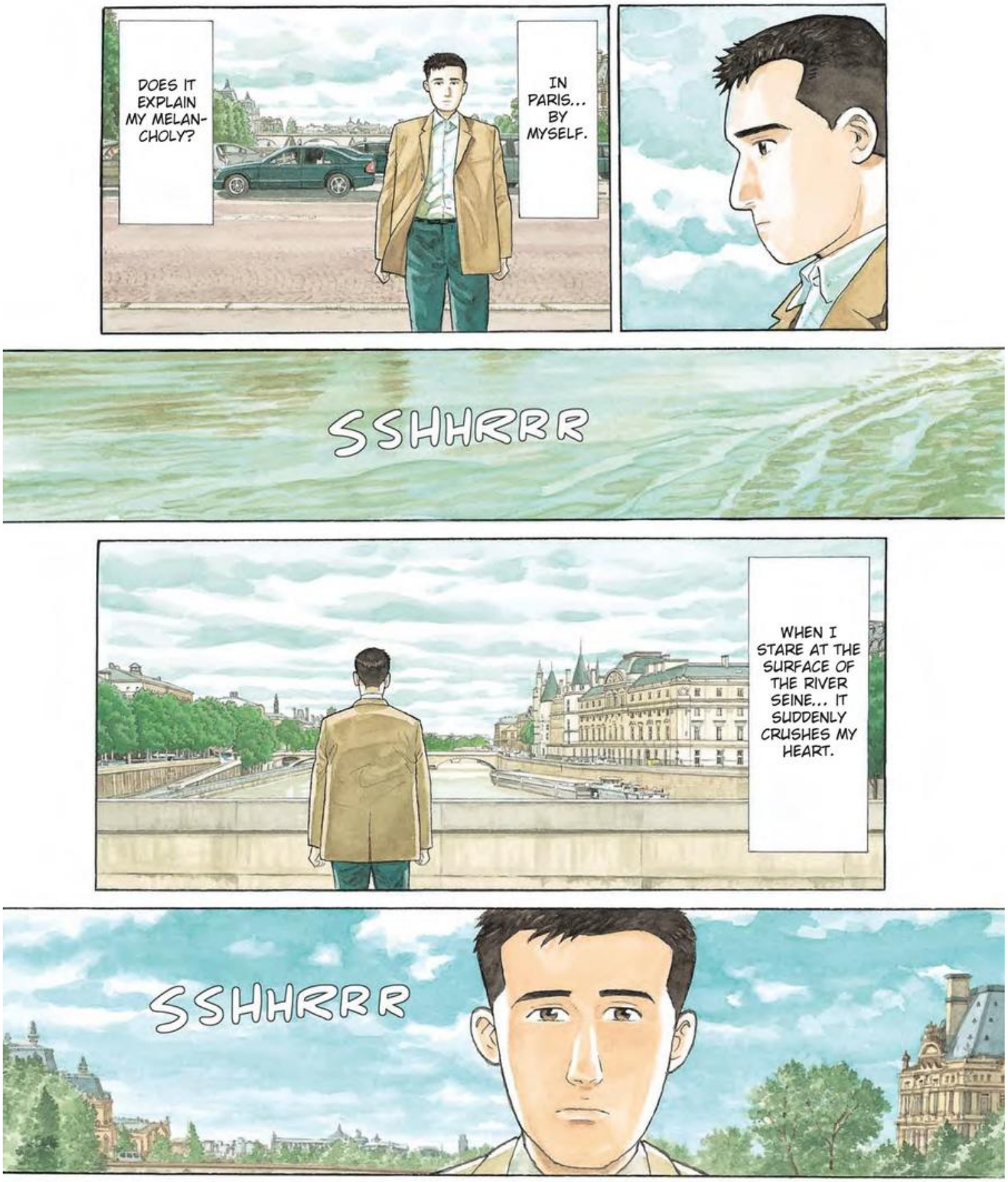
WHEN I OPEN MY EYES... I NEVER KNOW WHERE I'LL BE.




HOW MANY DAYS HAVE PASSED SINCE I CAME TO PARIS?

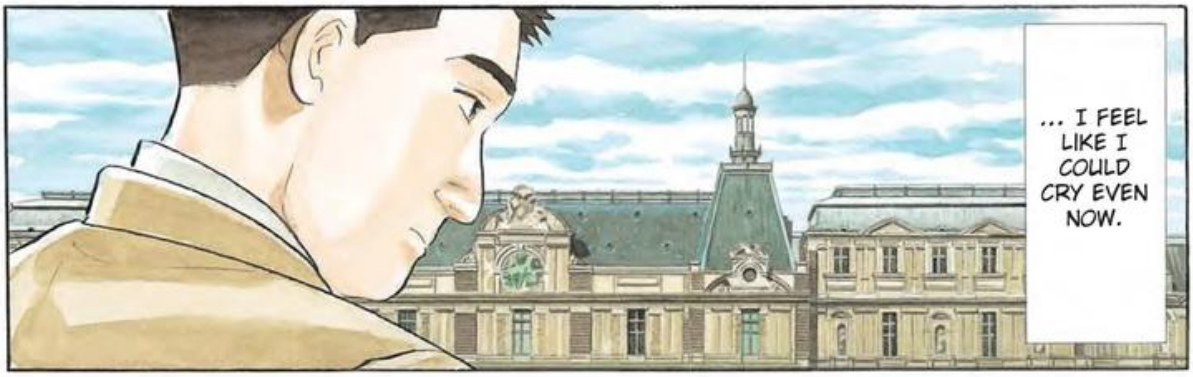

I'M LOSING ALL SENSE OF THE BOUNDA-RIES OF THE DAYS.


IT FEELS LIKE AS EACH DAY GOES BY, MY SENSE OF TIME IS BECOMING FAINTER.


DOES IT EXPLAIN MY MELAN-CHOLY?
IN PARIS... BY MYSELF.
SSHHRRR
WHEN I STARE AT THE SURFACE OF THE RIVER SEINE... IT SUDDENLY CRUSHES MY HEART.
SSHHRRR

THE ACCIDENT...
IT'S BEEN MORE THAN THREE YEARS SINCE IT HAPPENED.

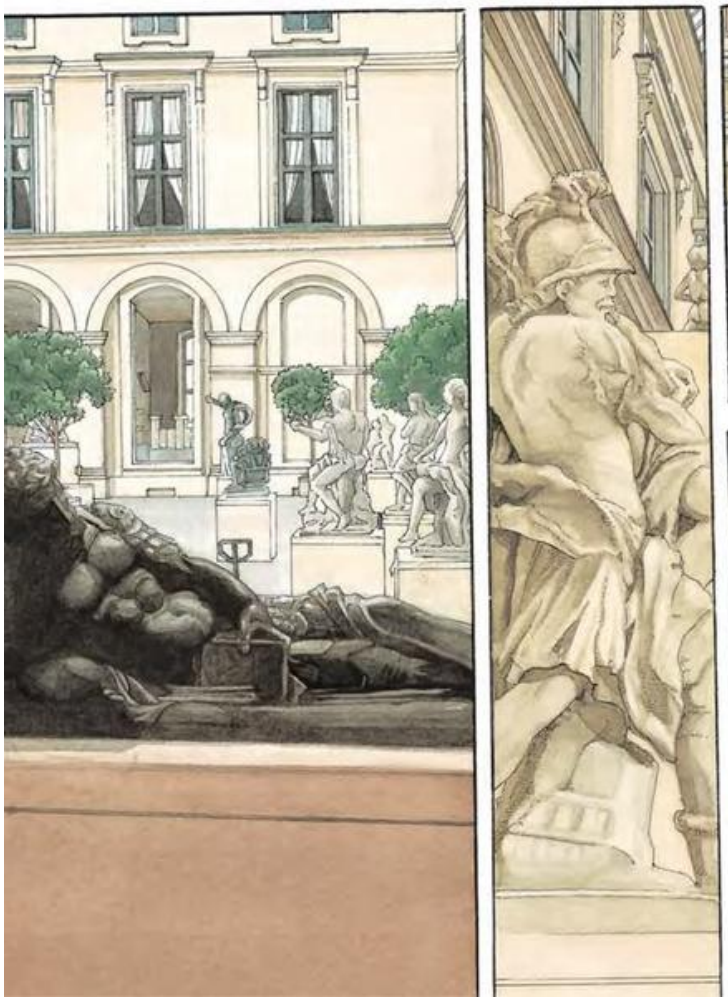
WHEN I THINK OF MY WIFE...
WHAT I LOST WAS TOO GREAT.


... I FEEL LIKE I COULD CRY EVEN NOW.

I HAVE TO TAKE THE FLIGHT HOME TOMORROW NIGHT.
MY MUSEUM TOUR ENDED UP BEING JUST OF THE LOUVRE.
FIVE DAYS ALREADY?

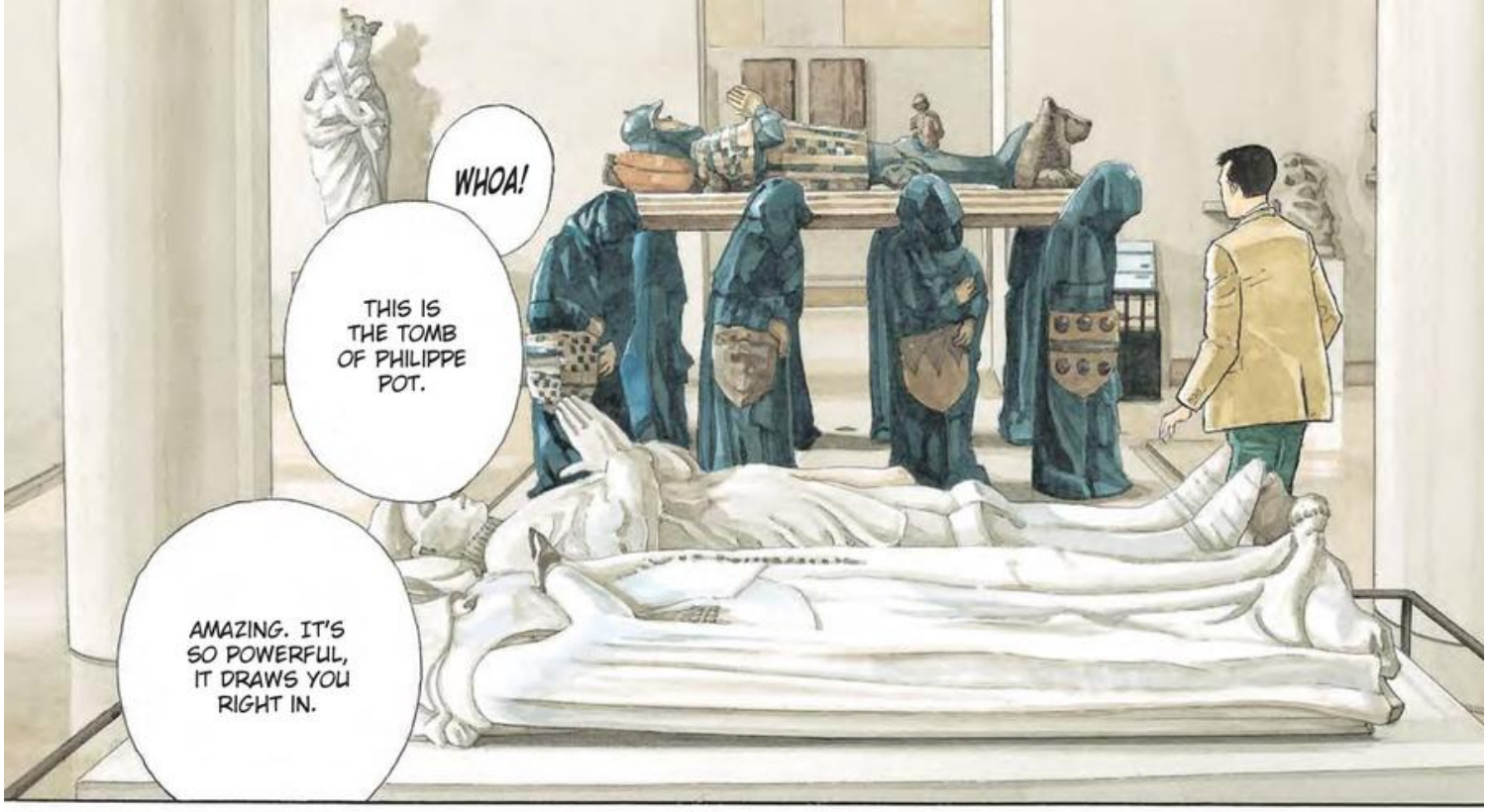
AS USUAL, THE NAPOLEON HALL BENEATH THE PYRAMID IS THRONGED WITH SIGHT-SEERS.

WHERE...
... AM I?
GETTING HUNGRY.



HMM.
I CAME UP FROM OVER THERE, SO...
... THAT MEANS I'M ON THE GROUND FLOOR.

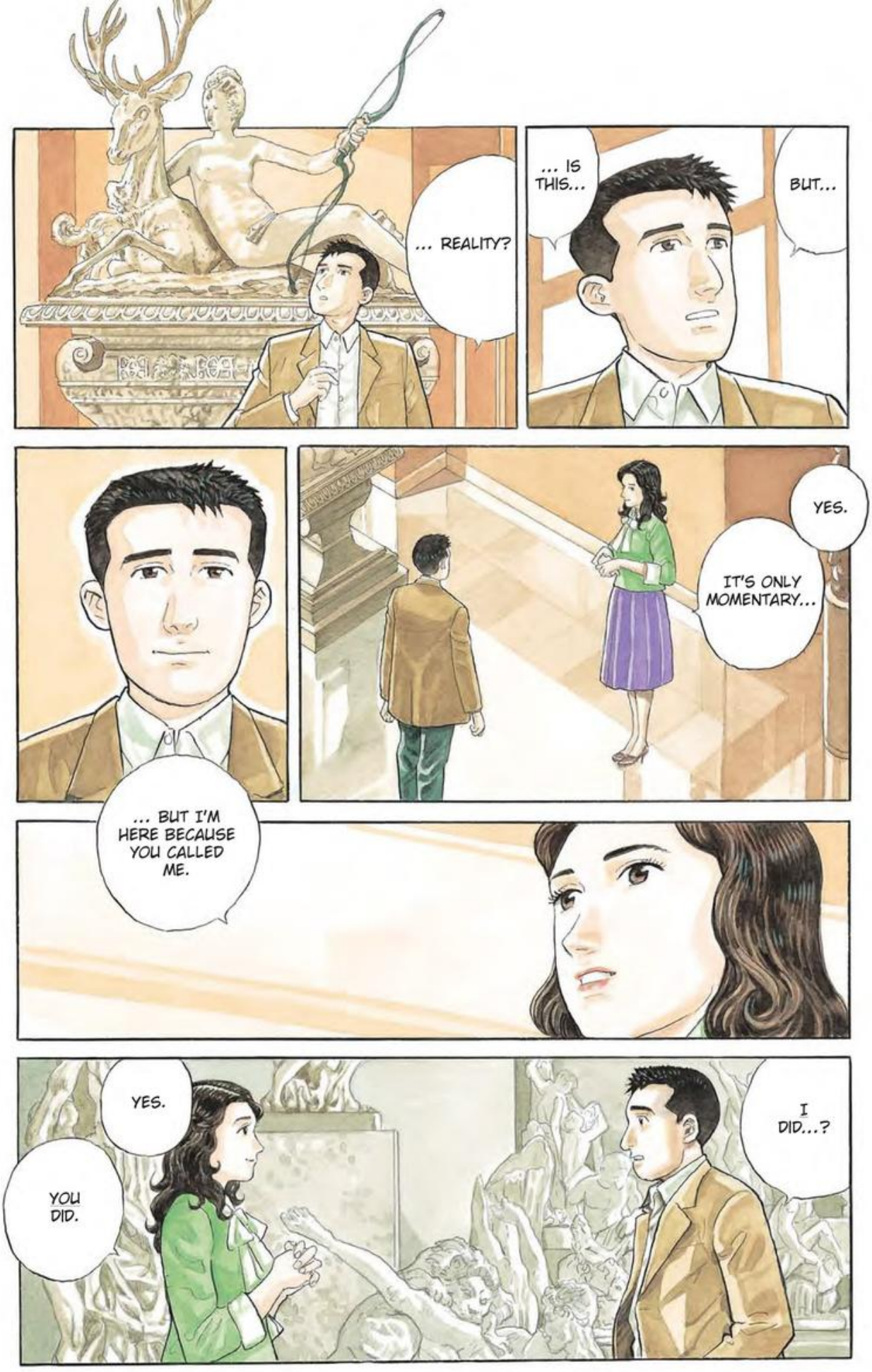
THE SULLY WING'S ANCIENT EGYPTIAN ART, THEN.


WHOA!
THIS IS THE TOMB OF PHILIPPE POT.
AMAZING. IT'S SO POWERFUL, IT DRAWS YOU RIGHT IN.

BUT...
... IT'S A BIT SPOOKY TOO.

HOW IS IT...
... YOU'RE HERE?
YOU.
I--IT CAN'T BE!

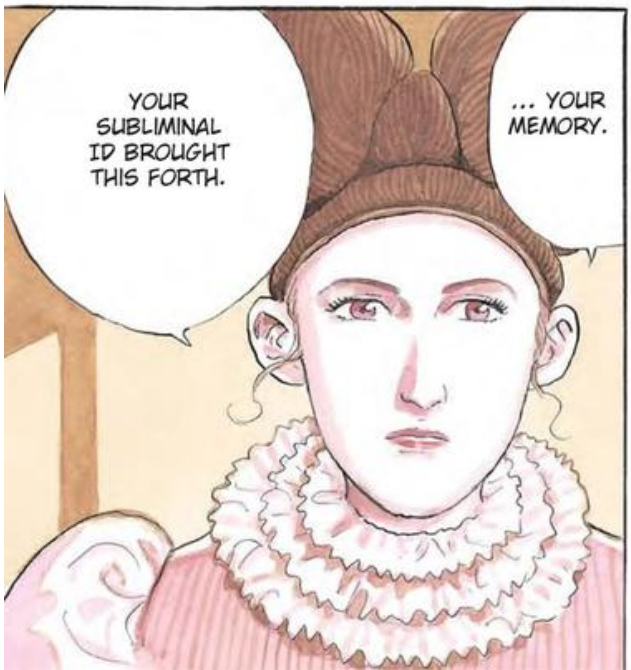
THIS IS THE PLACE...
... YOU SAID WE WOULD COME TOGETHER.
...
BUT...
... YOU'RE ...!
YES.
YOU'RE EXACTLY RIGHT.
YEAH.
YOU'RE RIGHT.
YOU PROMISED.
I'M SO GLAD...
...OUR DREAM CAME TRUE.
ME TOO.


... REALITY?
... IS THIS...
BUT...
YES.
IT'S ONLY MOMENTARY...
... BUT I'M HERE BECAUSE YOU CALLED ME.
YES.
YOU DID.
I DID...?

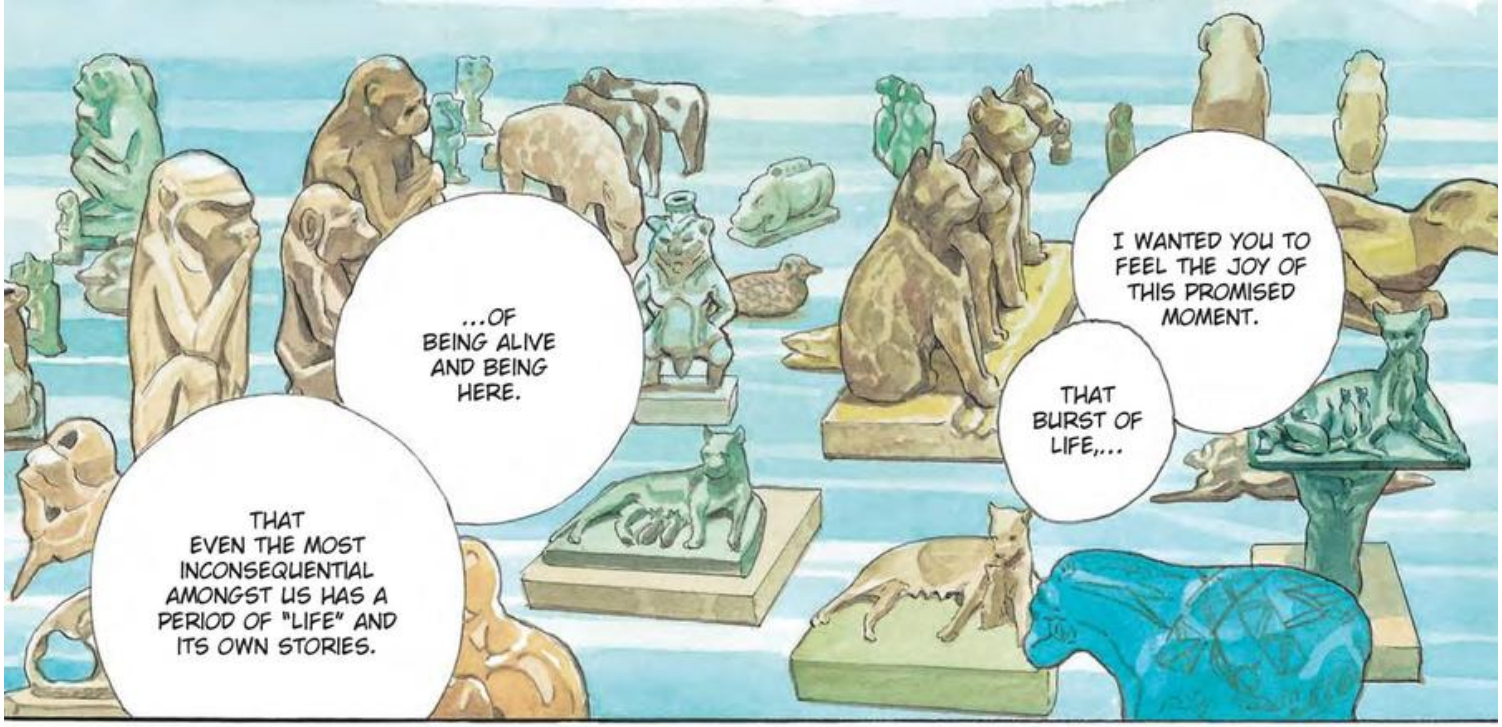
DON'T WORRY ABOUT ME.
I'M JUST FINE.
I'M NOT SUFFERING ANYMORE.
AND I'M SO VERY, VERY GRATEFUL TO YOU.
I'M SO GLAD I KNEW YOU...
... KEIKO.

NOOOO...!
AH...!
DON'T GO!
WAIT!
W--
KEIKO...
OOOH...!
... AND HAPPY.
BE STRONG...
LIVE.

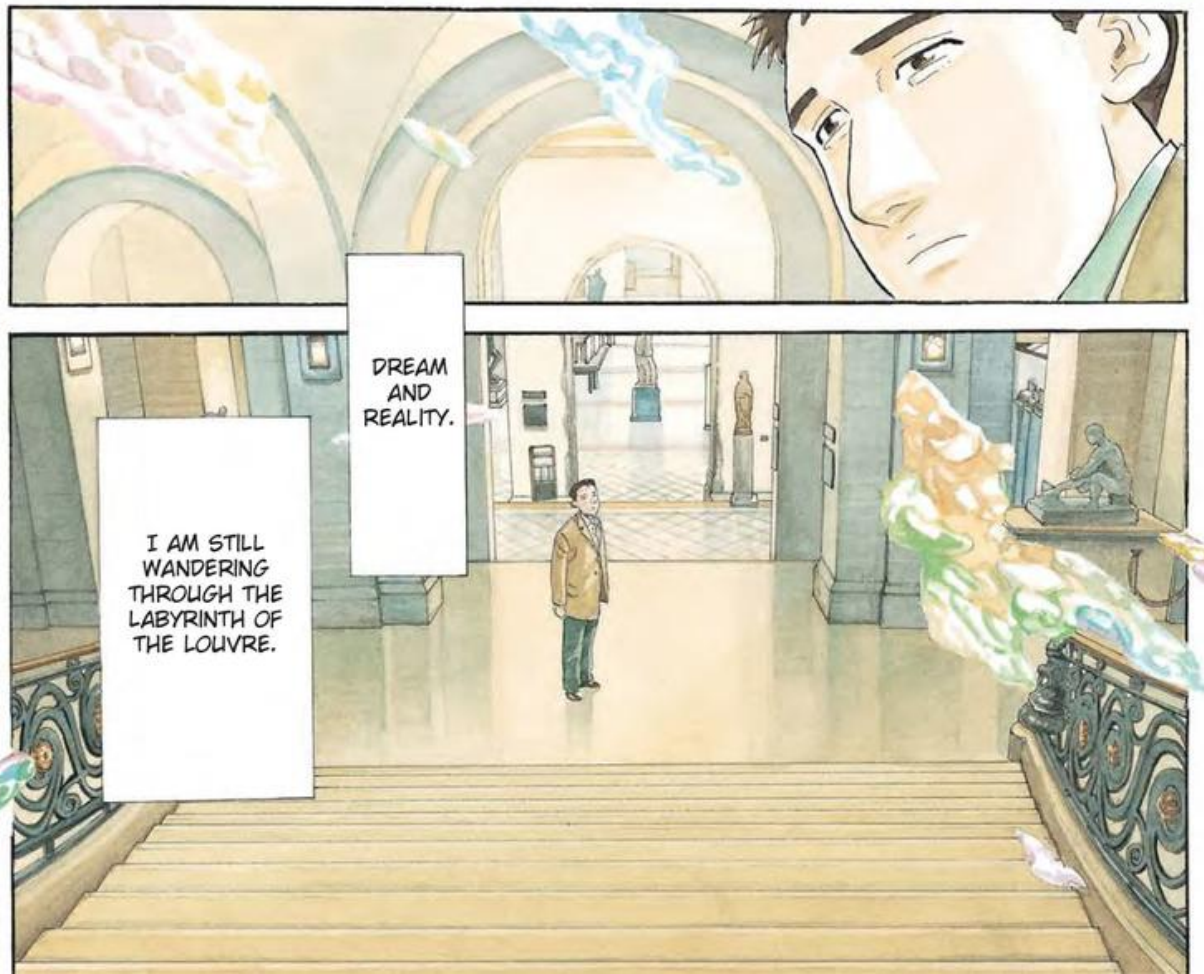
NO...!

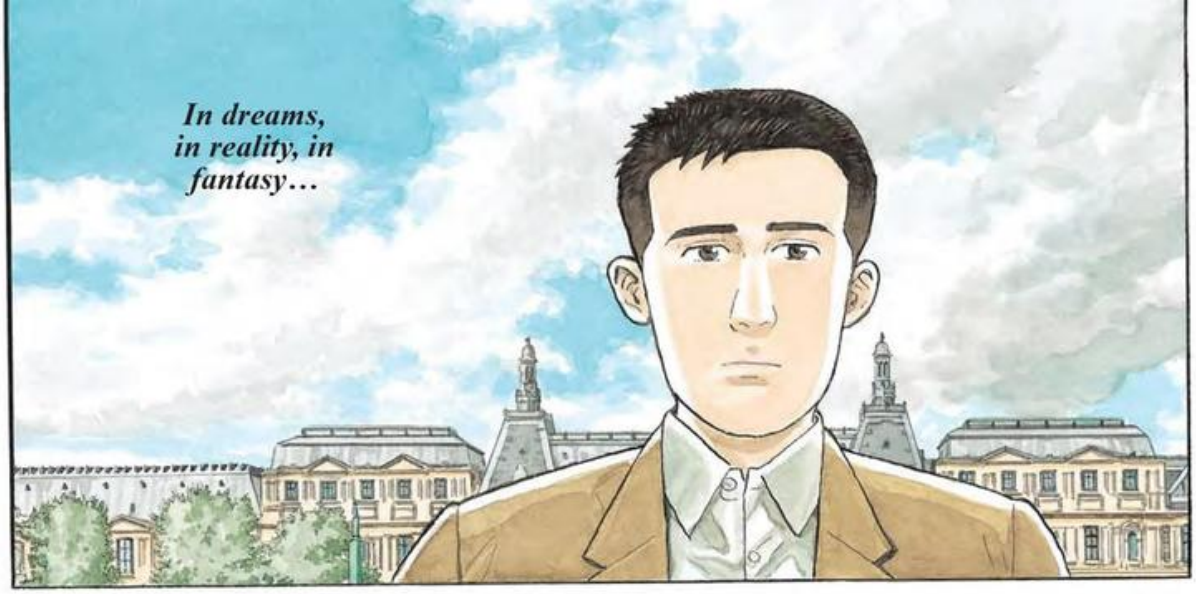

YOUR SUBLIMINAL ID BROUGHT THIS FORTH.
... YOUR MEMORY.

THIS IS AN IMAGE DEEP WITHIN YOUR STRONG CONSCIOUS-NESS,...
NO.
SO...
... ONE OF YOUR TRICKS AGAIN?


I WANTED YOU TO FEEL THE JOY OF THIS PROMISED MOMENT.
THAT BURST OF LIFE,...
...OF BEING ALIVE AND BEING HERE.
THAT EVEN THE MOST INCONSEQUENTIAL AMONGST US HAS A PERIOD OF "LIFE" AND ITS OWN STORIES.

WHAT YOU WERE GIVEN TO SEE...
...IS A REQUIEM FOR THE SPIRITS LIVING WITHIN EACH THING.


DREAM AND REALITY.
I AM STILL WANDERING THROUGH THE LABYRINTH OF THE LOUVRE.


In dreams,
in reality, in
fantasy…

…what is
it we see?

What loving
empathy?
What a dream
it is…
…that binds my
heart and does
not leave.

I HAVE MET VARIOUS PEOPLE.
I HAVE BRUSHED PAST VARIOUS AGES.

I HAVE BEEN FLOORED BY LEONARDO DA VINCI'S GRANDEUR.

THIS WONDROUS MAZE...

...THIS PALACE OF THE LOUVRE, IS INHABITED BY GUARDIANS.

Jean-Baptiste Corot (1796-1875)
Souvenir de Mortefontaine (Recollection of Mortefontaine), Salon of 1864
Oil on canvas, 25.5" x 35"

Paris, Musée du Louvre, Department of Paintings, M.I. 692 bis
© Musée du Louvre, dist. RMN/Angèle Dequier.

Jean-Baptiste Camille COROT (1796-1875)

"Mr. Corot stands at the head of the modern school of landscape painting."
(Baudelaire, Salon of 1845)

A major painter whose work was recognized only tardily and with a mixed reaction in his native land, Corot encountered a much less tepid welcome in Japan. Evidence of such was the complete engagement with and profound understanding of him by the then-young, unknown writer Roka —himself an amateur landscape painter— at a time when only a few of Corot's canvases had been exhibited in Japan.

From Corot's influence in the emergence of an even wider landscape movement (where the Japanese perception of art history includes Impressionism and what follows in a natural continuity), this enthusiasm from so afar for the great French landscape painter is also linked within the context of art history of the Far East, in which landscape painting —designated under the generic term of "mountain and water painting"— constitutes in and of itself an inescapable register, greatly preceding that of the West, where "the invention of the landscape" occurs after several centuries of representation focused, above all else, on the human figure.

Antonio FONTANESI (1818-1882)

An Italian landscape painter. Beginning in 1869, he teaches landscape painting at Turin's Accademia Albertina before departing for Japan where, from 1876 to 1878, he introduces the teaching of oil painting at the Technical Fine Arts School.

He is, thus, one of the many foreign advisors and educators recruited by the Meiji government in the assumed design of acquiring training from the school of the West in domains of knowledge, be they technical, scientific, legal or artistic: it is thanks to this educational effort, in its amplitude, depth, and rapidity, that Japan would avoid the colonization suffered by the rest of the Asian continent.

Founded in 1876, the Technical Fine Arts School introduces the study of the human body from living models and systematic work from nature in landscape depiction. Familiar with the work of French painters, Fontanesi refers to Corot and Millet in his teaching.

Subsequently, Tokyo's School of Fine Arts (founded in 1887) will encourage copying works from different schools and will introduce a new idea —unknown to traditional Japanese painting— whereby students were to cultivate their originality.

Reference: Christophe Marquet. "The Evolution of Teaching of Painting in the Second Half of the 19th Century," in Annick Horiuchi. ed., *Education in Japan and China. Elements of History*, Paris: Les Indes savants/Université Paris 7-Diderot Greja, colle. "Études japonaises," vol. 2, 2006.

Vincent VAN GOGH (1853-1890)

"We like Japanese painting, we've been subjected to its influence; all the Impressionists have that in common."
(Vincent Van Gogh, letter to his brother Theo)

The ultimate example of the "cursed artist," Van Gogh very soon attracts the interest of Japanese painters and artistic circles. His unhappy fate, the purity of his approach, and his posthumous recognition no doubt feed into in this considerable and, in certain respects, rather superficial infatuation.

The very keen interest that Van Gogh manifests over the years for the graphic arts of Japan, his attentive study of composition among artists such as Hiroshige or Hokusai, as well as the lessons he was able to learn in his own conception of art constitutes an undeniable link with Japan at the formal level. In other words, if this painter's work affected the Japanese public so much, no doubt it is because Van Gogh had accorded a great importance to Japanese pictorial motifs from which he was able to derive profoundly innovative formal lessons for the history of Western art. As often in aesthetic matters (and the welcome the West shows for an artist such as Jirô Taniguchi is proof of it in its own way), it sometimes happens that, outside of its own country, an artist's work encounters a kind of familiarity, like the fruit of a world vision itself imbued with foreign perceptions or sensibilities.

Reference: Exhibition catalog "Van Gogh, dreams of Japan" (Pinacothèque de Paris, 2012).

A few reference points to delve further by Ilan Nguyên

TOKUTOMI Roka (1868-1927)[1]

This Japanese writer lived during the Meiji (1868-1912) and Taishô (1912-1926) eras. He was also a translator and journalist. Both through his life and his writing, he is the embodiment of a high-profile intellectual figure in Japan at the beginning of the Twentieth Century.

Going up to the capital in 1889, he earns his living as a proofreader and translator, then as a journalist in the Min'yu-sha publishing company founded by his elder brother, the essayist Tokutomi Sohô, a journalist and man of authority with whom he will have a conflicted relationship throughout his entire life.

Made famous by the dazzling success of his novel Hototogisu (The Cuckoo), he becomes one of the most widely read writers of his generation; his collections of essays, in particular, enjoy a considerable success with the public.

Profoundly marked by the work of Leo Tolstoy, he decides, after returning from a trip to the West during which he met the eminent Russian writer, to embrace the Tolstoyan ideal of a peasant life.

Before experiencing celebrity, he had already published various single essays. In 1900, he gathers them into a volume that he titles *Nature and Man*, in which he includes "A poet of silence. The painter Corot," written in 1897. What should have been a simple article introducing the painter and his work becomes, under Roka's pen, a veritable petition, remarkable for its erudition, in favor of Corot, a French painter then little known in Japan, whom Roka is the first in his country to present in such a pertinent and thorough manner.

Reference: Jean-Jacques Origas. "The French 19th Century, Japan of the Meiji. Roka and Corot," in *Akutagava's Lamp. Essays on Modern Japanese literature*. Paris: Belles Lettres, collection japon, 2008.

[1] *His real name is Kenjirô (Roka is his chosen penname).*

ASAI Chû (1856-1907)

A Japanese painter trained at the Western school of oil painting (as opposed to the Japanese pictorial tradition), he is one of the disciples of the Italian artist Antonio Fontanesi at the Technical Fine Arts School. He will become one of the pioneers —and one of the most remarkable artists— of this movement open to the Western esthetic.

Beneficiary of a grant from the Japanese education ministry, he resides in France from 1900 to 1902. He then paints many landscapes and discovers art deco at a pivotal moment when the latter, in the context of Japonism, is immersing itself in the Japanese aesthetic: *"While Asai's generation had endeavored to learn the academic techniques of the West such as perspective, chiaroscuro, and modeling, in Paris, he discovers that young Parisian artist decorators were freeing themselves from those remnants of academicism by looking to Japanese techniques as a model: flattened faces without contours, but rendered by brush as in Oriental painting in India ink, [...] proximity and distance no longer articulated in linear but vertical perspective, between the top and bottom"* (INAGA Shigemi, "Visual Arts Thinking and Social Status in the Applied Arts and Crafts in a Japan Confronting Modernity (1900-1927)").

Upon his return to Japan, Asai teaches oil painting in the artistically very conservative city of Kyoto, before establishing his own school of painting. Among his best-known students are the painters YASUI Sôtarô and UMEHARA Ryûzaburô.

Reference: Christophe Marquet. "Asai Chû at the Universal Exposition of 1900: The Gaze of a Painter from Modern Japan," in *Cipango, Cahiers d'études japonaises* 2, "East and West in Japanese Art," February 1993, Paris. INALCO, Centre d'études japonaises.

Christophe Marquet, "The First Confrontation of Modern Japanese Artists with the West: the Case of Asai Chû at the Universal Exposition of 1900," in the exhibition catalog of *From Kuruda to Fujita: Japanese Painters in Paris*. Paris: Maison de la culture du Japon, 2007.

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Acknowledgements at the Louvre:
Jean-Luc Martinez, Vincent Pomarède, Aline François-Colin, Laurence Castany, Serge Leduc, Pascal Torres, Masami Sakai, Marie-Pierre Salé, Laura Angelucci, Roberta Serra, Caroline Damay, Violaine Bouvet-Lanselle, Catherine Dupont, Valérie Coudin,Fanny Meurisse, Diane Vernel, Adrien Goetz, Christine Fuzeau,Camille Sourisse, Chrystel Martin, Virginie Fabre, Joelle Cinq-Fraix, Niko Melissano, Guillaume Thomas, Xavier Milan.

To Oda Motoyuki Stephen, Yukiko Kamijima, Masato Hara, Nathalie Trafford, Denis Curty, Thierry Masbou, Christophe Duteil,Emmanuel Hoffman, Cécile Bergon, Béatrice Hedde, Annabelle Pegeon, Martin Maynial, Carole et Laurence de Vellou, Yann Lequeu,Christophe Kourita, Corinne Quentin, Pascal Becquet for their invaluable support.

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